आर्य्य धर्म प्रकाश

लेखक

अगस्त्य सन्यासी

आनरेरी प्रिंसिपल राधा कृष्ण हाई स्कूल जगराओं

भूतपूर्व धनपतराय बी. ए. एल. एल. बी वकील.

[illegible]त्ति
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मूल्य
[illegible]) आ०

"अमृत विद्युत प्रेस" रेलवे रोड, लाहौर में
पं० ईश्वरदास भार्गव के प्रबन्ध से छपा।

विषय सूची

* ओ३म् *

आर्य्य धर्म प्रकाश

१—आर्य शब्द के अर्थ—

यास्कमुनि अपने निरुक्त नामी ग्रन्थ में आर्य शब्द का अर्थ करते हुए लिखते हैं कि अर्य—अर्थात् परमात्मा के पुत्रों को आर्य कहा जाता है।

प्रश्न उठता है कि परमात्मा के पुत्र तो सारी सृष्टि ही है, इसलिए यहां सुपुत्र का भाव लेना उचित है। अर्थात् वह लोग जो "अनुव्रतः पितु पुत्रः । (पुत्र वह है जो पिता के व्रत के पीछे चलने वाला हो) श्रुति के अनुसार परमात्मा के सच्चे आत्मज हों। परमात्मा के गुणों से युक्त और परोपकारी पुरुषों को आर्य कहा जाता है॥

२—धर्म—

धारना अर्थात् जिसको उर्दू वाले अमल और अंग्रेजी वाले Performance of duty कहते हैं, जैमिनि ऋषि ने उत्तर मीमांसा में कर्तव्य को ही धर्म लिखा है, मन्तव्य आदि इस शब्द में नहीं आते।

३—आर्य धर्म—

भगवान् मनुने आर्य धर्म की व्याख्या करते हुए लिखा है—

धृतिक्षमादमोऽस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः।
धीर्विद्या सत्यमक्रोधो दशकं धर्म लक्षणम् ॥

अर्थात् दश कर्मों का नाम धर्म है, वह दश कर्म यह हैं—धैर्य्य, क्षमा, शत्रुओं का दमन, चोरी न करना, शुद्धि (मन, वाणी कर्म) इन्द्रियों को वश में रखना बुद्धि को बढ़ाना, विद्या प्राप्त करना, सत्य आचरण करना और सत्य बोलना, क्रोध न करना, जो यह दश कर्म करे वही आर्य है ॥

४—संसार में ऋषियों ने दो पथ बताए हैं एक भोग दूसरा त्याग—

कुछ लोग कहते हैं कि संसारको अच्छी तरह भोगो कुछ कहते हैं कि यह असार है इसलिये इसका त्याग ही अच्छा है—

प्रायः देखा जाता है कि दोनों ही अति की ओर लेजाकर मनुष्य को नाश कर देते हैं, ग्रीस अर्थात् यव" देश में भी यह दोनों मत अलग अलग प्रचलित

रहे पर उनको इनके मेल का पता न लगा जोकि वेद में स्पष्ट कहा गया है, यजु० अध्याय ४० मंत्र १ में लिखा है "त्यक्तेन भुञ्जीथा" अर्थात् ऐ पुरुषो ! संसार को त्याग कर भोगो, भोगों पर लिप्त न होवो मन सदैव परमात्मा की ओर लगाए रहो, जैसे कमलका फूल पानी में रहता हुआ भी पानी से ऊपर रहता है।

भगवान् कृष्ण जी ने भी गीता में इसी का विस्तार किया है और निष्काम कर्म को ही इस संसार से पार होने का सब से उत्तम पथ निश्चय किया है।

५–वेद बतलाते हैं कि ऐसा आचरण वही पुरुष कर सकता है जो अपने जीवन को यज्ञ रूप समझे अर्थात् उसका प्रत्येक कर्म यज्ञ के निमित्त हो, स्वार्थ रत्ती भर भी न हो। धर्म का नाम यज्ञ है अंग्रेजी में इसको Duty कहते हैं, लिखा है कि हे परमात्मन् ! मेरी आंख, नाक, कान आदि सब इन्द्रियां मेरी आयु तथा मेरा जीवन भी यज्ञ के ही वास्ते हो और तो क्या मेरा यज्ञ भी यज्ञ के लिये हो। यजु० अध्याय १८ मंत्र ३० ऐसा बनने के लिये इस प्रकार कर्म करो।

६—पञ्च महायज्ञ—

हर एक आर्य को यह पांच कर्म प्रतिदिन करने आवश्यक हैं,

(क) ब्रह्मयज्ञ, अर्थात् स्वाध्यायः

प्रतिदिन ब्राह्म मुहूर्त में उठकर नित्यकर्म कर पहले कुछ वर्षों तक वेद को पढ परमात्मा के स्वरूप का ज्ञान प्राप्त करे, स्वाध्याय थोड़े समय करना परन्तु करना प्रतिदिन जब परमात्मा के स्वरूप का ज्ञान हो जावे तो योग साधन द्वारा उसका अनुभव अर्थात् मेल प्राप्त करने का यत्न करना।

(ख) देवयज्ञ अर्थात् संसार की भैषज्य और दैवी शक्तियां पुष्ट करना जिस से वह शक्तियां शुद्ध पवित्र रह कर हमें पुष्ट करती रहें। जिस प्रकार पृथिवी में बीजा हुआ दाना सहस्र गुणा होकर हमको मिलता है उसी तरह इस यज्ञ में दिये हुए पदार्थ हमको सहस्र गुणा फलदायक होते हैं, इसीलिए यजुर्वेद में लिखा है कि हे यज्ञ ! तू शतधारा है, तू सहस्रधारा है.

मनुष्यके जीवन का आधार प्राण है और शुद्धवायु को ही प्राणवायु कहते हैं. यदि एक मुहूर्त हमको शुद्धवायु

न मिले या अशुद्धवायु मिले तो हमारा जीवनान्त होजावे, इसलिये वेद में लिखा है—

" वायो ! त्वमेवप्रत्यक्षं ब्रह्मासि " अर्थात् हे वायु ! तू ही प्रत्यक्ष ब्रह्म है. फिर इस वायु में यदि पुष्टि कारक और रोग नाशक पदार्थों के प्रमाणु मिला दिये जावें और उस वायु को हम सांस में लिया करें तो और भी अधिक लाभ होगा. वायु में जो हानिकारक- रोग उत्पन्न करने वाले कृमि या प्रमाणु मिलते रहते हैं वह भी हमें किसी प्रकार नष्ट करते रहना नितान्त आवश्यक है इसलिए हरएक आर्य को चाहिए कि प्रतिदिन प्रातः सायं अग्निकुण्ड में अग्नि प्रज्वलित कर उस में सुगन्धिदायक-पुष्टिकारक रोग नाशक पदार्थ हवन कर वायु मण्डल को अपने लिए तथा संसार के लिए लाभदायक बनाता रहे वायु में जो प्रमाणु होते हैं वही वृष्टि के साथ वर्षा करते हैं और वही खेतों में पड़कर अन्न को अपना असर दे देते हैं इसी आशय को लेकर गीता में कहा है।

अन्नाद्भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः।
यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः॥
अ० ३ श्लो० १४

इसलिए अच्छा अन्न पैदा करना चाहो तो भी हवन करना उचित है, देवयज्ञ का एक और भी लाभ है, इस यज्ञ के कारण घर के सभी नर नारी बच्चे नौकर प्रतिदिन सायं प्रातः इकट्ठे होकर परमात्मा का पूजन करते रहेंगे, अलग अलग कोई करे, कोई न करे इस तरह सबको अवश्य सम्मिलित होना पड़ेगा।

(ग) अतिथि यज्ञ—

अर्थात् देशविदेश के विद्वान् सन्त महात्माओं की सेवा करना और प्रतिदिन इन में से किसी एक को भोजन खिलाकर आप भोजन करना जिससे यह लोग हमारे घरों में आते रहें और हमारा उपकार करते रहें,

(घ) पितृयज्ञ अर्थात् पितरों के ऋण से उऋण होने का उपाय प्रसिद्ध ही है कि पुत्र, अर्थात् नरक से बचाने वाली अच्छी सन्तान उत्पन्न करना और उसको ऐसा सुयोग्य बनना जिससे वह हमारे पूर्वजों के यश को

कलङ्कित न होने दे और प्रचलित भी रक्खे, यही वास्तविक पितृयज्ञ है,

पितृसंज्ञा वाले अर्थात् सोसाइटी की सेवा में लगे हुए सज्जनों की सेवा करना और उन के कार्य में सहायक होना भी इस यज्ञका भाग है,

(ङ) वैश्वदेव यज्ञ—

मनुष्य के हितकारी प्राणीमात्र के निमित्त प्रतिदिन कुछ देना या कोई कर्म करना इस में लंगड़े लूले बूढे निर्धन दरिद्र आदि मनुष्य तथा घरेलू जीव, पक्षी, पीपल, वट, आम्र, आदि वृक्ष सभी आगए।

तीन अग्नियां या ज्योतियां जो सुख चाहने वाले हरएक गृहस्थी को सदैव प्रज्वलित रखनी चाहिए

१—परिश्रमी (मेहनती) धर्मात्मा मीठा बोलने वाली और गृहकार्योंमें कुशल तथा चतुर स्त्री,

जैसे एक पहिये से गाड़ी नहीं चल सकती इसी तरह स्त्री के बिना गृहस्थ नहीं रह सकता। स्त्री को शास्त्रों में गृहाग्नि कहा गया है जिस को यज्ञ के साथ २४ घण्टे प्रसन्न और प्रज्वलित रखना हर एक गृहस्थी के सुख का मूल आधार है,

२–पुरोहित अर्थात् गुरू—

यह गृहस्थी के धर्म का संरक्षक होता है और उसको धर्म पर से गिरने या कुमार्ग में जाने से बचाता है, सांसारिक बातों में भी अपने उपदेश और सहायता से उसका सहायक होता है जब २ गृहस्थियों पर कोई विपत्ति आती रही है तो पुरोहित लोग अपना शरीर अर्पण करके भी उनकी सहायता करते रहे हैं, गृहस्थियों के बालकों की शिक्षा भी पुरोहित ही करते थे इसलिए हर एक आर्य को चाहिये कि अच्छे से अच्छे विद्वान् और परोपकारी, त्यागी, पुरुष को अपने कुल का पुरोहित नियत करे और सदैव प्रसन्न रक्खे शास्त्रों में पुरोहित को आह्वनीय अग्नि कहा है

३–दाक्षिणाग्नि—

सद्गुणों से युक्त अच्छी सन्तान प्रसिद्ध ही है कि जिस के सन्तान न हो उसका घर बिना दीपक सदृश अन्धकार युक्त होता है, पितृ ऋण से मुक्त होने का भी यही एकमात्र उपाय है पर बुद्धि हीन सन्तान की अपेक्षा सन्तान हीन रहना अच्छा है इसवास्ते प्रत्येक आर्य को चाहिये कि सदैव अपनी सन्तान को

अच्छा बनाने का प्रयत्न करता रहे. सन्तान को ही शास्त्रों में दक्षिणाग्नि कहा गया है. (ऐत्रेय ब्राह्मण)

८—आश्रम अर्थात् समय विभाग—

सब कोई जानते हैं कि यदि समय विभाग करके कार्य किये जावें तो हर एक कार्य्य अपने २ समय पर ठीक भी होजाता है और कोई कार्य शेष भी नहीं रह जाता इसी लिए स्कूलों आदि में टाइम टेबल (Time-Table) बनाया जाता है इसी तरह मनुष्य को भी चाहिये कि अपने जीवन का (Time Table) बना लें जिससे उस के लोक परलोक दोनों सिद्ध हो जावें मनुष्य की आयु १०० वर्ष की गिनी गई है उपरोक्त अभिप्राय की सिद्धि के लिए हमारे शास्त्रकारों ने इन १०० वर्षों को इस प्रकार बांटा है ५० वर्ष लोकसिद्धि के लिए और ५० वर्ष परलोक सिद्धि के लिए पहिले ५० में से २५ वर्ष ब्रह्मचर्य अर्थात् व्रत और विद्याप्राप्ति द्वारा शरीर और बुद्धि दोनों को पुष्ट करना और पुष्ट कर फिर २५ वर्ष तक गृहस्थ करना। इस तरह सांसारिक प्यास बुझा कर ५० की आयु में अपने सांसारिक

कार्य अपने पुत्रों को सौंप कर बन को चले जाना. २५ वर्ष बन में रह कर स्वाध्याय, एकान्त बास और तपस्या द्वारा अपने को पूर्ण त्यागी बना लेना, फिर सन्यासी होकर २५ वर्ष देश विदेश घूम गृहस्थियों को सदुपदेश द्वारा धर्मोपदेश करना।

९—समाज या सोसाइटी में स्त्री जाति का स्थान।

आर्य लिटरेचर में स्त्री को अर्धांगिनी कहा है, जहां पुरुष के लिये देव, नर, पति, कहा है वहां स्त्री को नारी, देवी, पत्नी कह कर बराबर का दर्जा दिया गया है, शास्त्रों में पुरुष और स्त्री के परस्पर संबन्ध को इस प्रकार भी वर्णन किया गया है पुरुष द्यौ है और स्त्री पृथिवी है, पुरुष आदित्य है और स्त्री चन्द्रमा है, पुरुष प्राण है और स्त्री रयै है, पुरुष जीवात्मा है तो स्त्री जीवात्मा का शरीर है; पुरुष का कोई यज्ञ स्त्री के बिना पूर्ण नहीं हो सकता, आर्य सभ्यता में स्त्री के लिए परदा अर्थात् घर में बन्द रखना कहीं नहीं दीख पड़ता उपनिषदों में लिखा है।

तथा भगवान् मनु ने भी मनुस्मृति में प्रतिपादन किया है—

यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवताः ।
यत्रैतास्तु न पूज्यन्ते सर्वास्तत्राफलाः क्रियाः ॥

अ० ३ श्लो० ५६

जहां नारियों की पूजा होती है वहां ही देवता प्रसन्न होकर विचरते हैं, देवियां ही देवताओं को पैदा कर सकतीं हैं । हिन्दी में भी कहा है—

नारी निन्दा न करो, नारी नर की खान ।
नारी ही से उपजे ध्रुव, प्रह्लाद समान ॥

भगवान् मनुजी ने माता को पिता से भी अधिक अधिकार दिया है—

उपाध्यायान्दशाचार्य आचार्याणां शतं पिता ।
सहस्रंतु पितॄन्माता गौरवेणाति रिच्यते ॥

अ० २ श्लो० १४५

अर्थात् उपाध्याय से अधिक दशगुणा मान्य आचार्य और आचार्य से सौ गुणा मान्य पिता तथा पिता से हजार गुणा मान्य माता होती है, शास्त्रों में स्त्री को पुरुष का मित्र कहा गया है, विवाह के समय सप्तपदी की रीति की जाती है, अर्थात् वधू को सात पग चला-

या जाता है और हर एक पग पर पति उसको एक से एक उत्तम पदवी देता जाता है, सातवें पगपर पति उसको "मित्रे सप्तपदी भव" यह कह कर पुकारता है।

१०–मित्रस्य चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षामहे ॥

सारे संसार को मित्रकी दृष्टि से देखो, अर्थात् सबका हित चिन्तन करो, मित्र और अमित्र साधु और दुष्ट के प्रति एक जैसा बर्ताव करना हित नहीं है यथा-योग्य बर्ताव करना चाहिये भगवान् ने गीता में स्पष्ट कहा है—

परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थायसम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥

अ० ४ श्लो० ८

बेदमें भी लिखा है—

मित्रं सौव्रत्येन रुद्रं दौर्व्रत्येन ।

यजु० अ० ३९ मं० ९

अर्थ–मित्र के प्रति श्रेष्ट कर्म से और दुष्ट के प्रति दुष्टाचार से बर्तो,

११–अज और अमर तीन शक्तियां,

अर्थात् परमात्मा, आत्मा, और प्रकृति, वेद में लिखा है—

द्वा सुपर्णा सयुजा सखाया
समानं वृक्षं परिषस्वजाते।
तयोरन्यः पिप्पलं स्वाद्वत्य-
नश्नन्न्यो अभि चाकशीति ॥

दो पक्षी सदैव इकट्ठे रहने वाले और मित्र (परमात्मा और आत्मा) एक ही वृक्ष (प्रकृति) पर रहते हैं, उन में से एक फलों को खाता है दूसरा (परमात्मा) देखता है, ऋक० मं० १ सू० १६४ मन्त्र २०

१२—पुनर्जन्म—

यदि यह मानलिया जाय कि मृत्युके पश्चात् मनुष्य का कुछ भी शेष नहीं रहता तो भी शास्त्रकार कहते हैं कि पुरुष का अपनी सन्तान के रूप में पुनर्जन्म होता है, प्रत्येक पुरुष विशेष संस्कारों का पुञ्ज होता है, सन्तान में पिता के संस्कार अवश्य जन्म लेते हैं यदि पिता का पुनर्जन्म नहीं होता तो क्या ? यही कारण है कि स्त्री को "जाया" कहा गया है अर्थात् वह जिस में पति स्वयं जन्म लेता है, श्रुति भी इसी अर्थ को कहती है—

आत्मा वै जायते पुत्रः ॥

यदि मृत्यु के पश्चात् मनुष्य की जीवात्मा शेष रहती है तब तो उसका पुनर्जन्म अर्थात् दूसरा शरीर धारण करना आवश्यकीय ही है संसार में सर्वत्र यह नियम काम करता दिखाई देता है कि जैसी कोई वस्तु होती है वह अपने समान दूसरी वस्तु को आकर्षण करती रहती है, मनुष्य के अन्दर बहुत सी पशु वृत्तियां हैं, जिस पुरुष ने पशु वृत्तियों पर विजय प्राप्त करली है उसका तो पुनर्जन्म होता ही नहीं पर जो कोई नहीं प्राप्त कर सकता उस में मृत्यु के समय जो पशुवृत्ति अधिक होगी मृत्युके पश्चात् वह स्वयं उस जगह आकर्षित हुआ चला जायगा जहां उसी पशुवृत्ति का विकाश हो रहा होगा, नियम वही है जो ऊपर बताया गया है अर्थात् समान को आकर्षण करना, आत्मा का अपने बन्धनों को काट सकना शनैः शनैः ही हो सकता है और इस के वास्ते सैकड़ों जन्म होने आवश्यक हैं इसी के लिए उपनिषद् कार लिखते हैं और गीता में भी लिखा है—

प्रयत्नाद्यतमानस्तु योगी संशुद्ध किल्बिषः ।
अनेकजन्म संसिद्ध स्ततो याति परांगतिम् ॥

अ० ६ श्लो० ४५

अर्थात् अनेक जन्मों में योग सिद्ध होता है तब मनुष्य परमगति को प्राप्त होता है,

१३—कर्म—

जैसा करोगे वैसा भरोगे, जैसा बीजोगे वैसा काटोगे। किसी आदमी की सिफारिश परमात्मा के इस नियम के विरुद्ध काम नहीं आसकती प्रत्येक कर्म अपना फल रखता है कभी २ किसी एक कर्म के फल को दूसरे कर्म अर्थात् प्रायश्चित (तप) से किसी अंश तक बदला भी जा सकता है। रामायण में लिखा है कि हर एक पाप का प्रायश्चित होसकता है, परन्तु कृतघ्नता का कोई प्रायश्चित नहीं कर्म किए जावो कभी आलस्य को पास न आने दो। बड़े से बड़े और भय पूर्ण कामों में भी हाथ डालने से कभी न झिझको, अपने और अपने पूर्वजों के यश की यत्न से रक्षा करो, पर अपना चित्त शान्त, और ईश्वर परायण रक्खो, वेद में लिखा है " आर्य पुरुषो ! कर्म करते

हुए ही सौ वर्ष जीने की इच्छा करो" यही कारण था कि पुराणे आर्य और आधुनिक हिन्दू भी खटिया में पड़कर मरना बहुत बुरा समझते हैं। संसार संग्राम में युद्ध करते हुए मरना ही उनका आदर्श था। भगवान् कृष्ण ने अर्जुन को ऐसा ही कहा था—

हतो वा प्राप्स्यासि स्वर्गं जित्वा वा भोक्ष्यसे महीम्

गी० अ० २ श्लो० ३६

१४—वर्ण (Caste)

कामों की बांट के नियम के अनुसार प्रत्येक मनुष्य के लिए एक समय में एक ही काम करना अच्छा है। इस प्रकार काम भी अच्छा होगा और स्वयं मनुष्य के लिये और उसकी जाति के लिये भी अधिक लाभदायक होगा, आज कल भी कारखानों में इसी तरह काम बांट कर किया जाता है। यास्क मुनि ने निरुक्त में लिखा है "वर्णो वृणोतेः" अ० २ खण्ड ३ अर्थात् वर्ण वह सामाजिक संज्ञा है जो मनुष्य अपने गुण, कर्म, स्वभाव, से स्वयं प्राप्त करता है. जैसे पुरुष को सुखी और जीवन रखने के लिये मुख, बाहु, ऊरु, और पाद अच्छे होने जरूरी हैं उसी तरह जाति

के उन्नत रखने के लिये विद्वान, बलवान्, धनवान, और सेवक, इन चारों की आवश्यकता है। जो पुरुष इन चारों में से जौन सा काम अच्छा करसके उसकी वही संज्ञा होनी चाहिये। मनुजी ने लिखा है—

योऽनधीत्य द्विजो वेदमन्यत्र कुरुते श्रमम्।
स जीवन्नेव शूद्रत्व माशु गच्छति सान्वयः

अ० २ श्लो० १६८

१५—किसकी उपासना करनी चाहिए।

उपनिषद् कार लिखते हैं—

ओ३म् इत्येतदक्षरं उद्गीथमुपासीत।

अक्षर अर्थात क्षयरहित अर्थात् अमर अविनाशी परमात्मा की उपासना करो जिसका सर्वोत्तम वैदिक नाम ओ३म् है और जो इस सारे संसार का उद्गीत है अर्थात् इस संसार की प्रत्येक वस्तु जिसका राग आलाप रही है,

१६—गुरु मंत्र—

अर्थात् सब से बड़ा उपदेश। गुरु अपने शिष्य को बीज रूप से एक ऐसी बात बताता है जिसके करलेने से उसको लोक और परलोक दोनों प्राप्त हो सकते हैं।

कहावत है "हाथी के पाओं में सब का पांव" एक-बात सिद्ध हो जाने से सब बातें स्वयं ही सिद्ध हो सकतीं हैं, वहबात यह है कि जैसे अर्जुन के सारथी भगवान स्वयं बने तभी अर्जुन को विजय प्राप्त हो सकी, इसी तरह यदि मनुष्य की बुद्धि के सारथी सर्वज्ञ और सर्वशक्तिमान् परमात्मा स्वयं बन जावें तो मनुष्य को इस संसार में किसी वस्तु की कमी नहीं रह सकती। यही परमात्मा का सब से उत्तम सविता रूप है अर्थात् प्रेरणा करने वाला रूप है जिसकी मनुष्य को इच्छा करनी चाहिये। मनुष्य जो काम करता है बुद्धि से प्रेरित होकर करता है जैसे सविता (सूरज) इस पृथ्वी की आत्मा है इसी तरह यदि परमात्मा मनुष्य की बुद्धि के चलाने वाले हों तो वह कभी कोई भूल नहीं कर सकता और उसको सदैव विजय ही प्राप्त होगी मन्त्र यह है—

भूर्भुवः स्वः तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गोदेवस्य धीमहि धियो योनः प्रचोदयात॥

अर्थ, विद्या, शारीरिकबल और ऐश्वर्य (धनसम्पत्ति)

अर्थात् प्रत्येक आर्य्य को चाहिए कि इन तीनों का प्राप्त करने का पूरा यत्न करे, इन तीनों को प्राप्त करके ही वह इस संसार सागर में सुख से तैर सकता है।

हम सविता देव के उस उत्तम रूप को अपनी बुद्धि में चिन्तन करते हैं जो हमारी बुद्धि को प्रेरणा करे, अर्थात् जिस तरह सविता-सूरज इस पृथ्वी का संचालक है इसी तरह परमात्मा हमारी बुद्धि के संचालक हों।

गीता के अन्त में भी भगवान्‌ने यही बात कही है—

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः।
तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिर्ध्रुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥

जहां योगेश्वर कृष्ण होंगे और जहां धनुर्धारी अर्जुन होंगे (अर्थात् जहां पुरुषार्थी मनुष्य होगा और परमात्मा उसकी बुद्धि के संचालक होंगे) वहां ही लक्ष्मी, विजय, सुख, होगा यह मेरी निश्चय मति (राय) है। इस एक ही मंत्र में सब गुप्तभेद गुरू ने कह दिया है।

१७—मनुष्य जीवन का अन्तिम आदर्श।

स्वर्ग प्राप्ति नहीं परन्तु परमात्मा का तद् रूप होजाना, इसी को भगवान् बुद्धने निर्वाण कहा है अर्थात् परमा-

त्मा के गुणों से युक्त हो जाना और ऐसी शान्ति या सम अवस्था प्राप्त करलेना जिसको संसार का सुख दुःख चलायमान न करसके। इसी अवस्था को वेदान्त वालों ने ईश्वर में मिलजाना, और योगी लोगों ने ईश्वर का योग होजाना कहा है, इसका अभिप्राय नष्ट होजाना नहीं परन्तु (Master) या प्रभु पदवी लेना है। इस अवस्था में मनुष्य सारे संसार का उपकारक धर्मी होजाता है, अर्थात् प्रभु की सारी सृष्टि का सच्चा निष्काम सेवक होजाता है, वेद में लिखा है "यो असावादित्ये पुरुषः सोऽहं अस्मि" इसका अर्थ परमात्मा बन जाना नहीं परन्तु परमात्मा के रंग में रंगे जाना है।

१८–पतितोद्धार।

पतितों का उद्धार करना सदैव से हर एक आर्य का कर्तव्य रहा है वेद में लिखा है—

उतदेवा अवहितं देवा देवा उन्नयथाः पुनः।
उतागश्चक्रुषं देवा जीवयथाः पुनः॥

अथर्व. ४–१३.

अर्थात हे विद्वान् आर्यपुरुषो! नीचे गिरे हुओं को

फिरसे उठाओ जिन लोगों ने पाप किया है और उस के कारण नीचे गिर गए उनको फिर से जीवन प्रदान करो, मनुस्मृति में लिखा है वर्ण चार ही हैं पांचवां कोई वर्ण नहीं हैं, इससे सिद्ध है कि जो पुरुष ब्राह्मण क्षत्री वैश्य नहीं हैं, वे सब के सब शूद्र हैं। मनुस्मृति या किसी भी अन्य शास्त्र या स्मृति में शूद्रों से न छूने का तो कहीं नाम ही नहीं है रहा उनके हाथ से पके हुए अन्न को ग्रहण करने का प्रश्न सो मनुजी ने स्पष्ट लिख दिया है—

आर्धिकः कुलमित्रश्च गोपालो दासनापितौ ।
एते शूद्रेषु भोज्यान्ना यश्चात्मानं निवेदयेत् ॥

मनु अ० ४ श्लो० २५३

अर्थात् खेती करने वाले, कुल के मित्र, दास, गोपाल, और नाई इन शूद्रों के हाथ का पका हुआ अन्न खाने योग्य है और उस शूद्र के हाथ का भी जो अपना वृत्तान्त हम से वर्णन करदे।

इस अन्तिम बात में किसी भी शूद्र को शेष नहीं रहने दिया यह सबको ज्ञात ही है कि ब्राह्मण क्षत्री वैश्य तीनों वर्णों के पुरुषों को शूद्रकन्या से विवाह

करलेना शास्त्रोक्त है फिर न छूना और हाथ का पका हुआ न खाना कैसे हो सकता था। भविष्य पुराण में स्पष्ट लिखा है कि ऋषि कण्व मिश्र देश मे १० हजार म्लेच्छ आर्यावर्त में लाए और उन में से कई हजार क्षत्री और वैश्य बना दिए, उनमें से एक पृथु को राजा भी बना दिया। इस तरह शूद्र और म्लेच्छों आदिका उन्नति करके ऊपर के वर्णों में चले जाना इतिहास सिद्ध बात है और इसी तरह अब भी हो सकता है।

१९–स्वतन्त्रता प्रेम।

कोई आर्य्य कभी दास बनने, या बनाये जाने के भाव को स्वप्न में भी सहन नहीं कर सकता था, मनुष्य का दास बनना तो एक ओर रहा। हर एक आर्य्य अपने को परमात्मा के सम्बन्ध में भी पुत्र अथवा सखा ही सझमता था। विदेशी एक लेखक ने भी अपनी आर्यन रूल इन इण्डिया नाम पुस्तक में लिखा है "कोई आर्य कभी दास नहीं बनाया जा सकता" यह इस जाति का अधिकार पत्र था।

२०–दान।

"परोपकाराय सतांविभूतयः" अर्थात् सत् पुरुषों का

सर्वस्व परोपकारके ही लिए है। जहां परोपकार और दान की अतिशय प्रसंशा है वहां कुपात्र को दान देना महापाप भी कहा गया है जो दान देने वाले को नष्ट कर देता है इस लिए दान सदैव करना चाहिए परन्तु सुपात्र को चाहिए कुपात्र को कदाचित् कुछ न देना चाहिए।

२१–मृत्यु पर विजय पाना और अमर होना।

ब्रह्मचर्य्य और तप द्वारा शरीर मन, और बुद्धि को भले प्रकार उत्तमोत्तम बनाकर सौ बर्ष या इससे भी अधिक जीने का यत्न करना हर एक आर्य का कर्तव्य होना चाहिए इसी लिए वेदों में लिखा है "अस्माभवतु ते तनु" तेरा शरीर बज्र की तरह होवे।

ब्रह्मचर्य्येण तपसा देवा मृत्युमपाघ्नत।
इन्द्रोह ब्रह्मचर्य्येण देवेभ्यः स्वराभरत्॥

अथर्व सू० ५ मं० १९ काण्ड ११

अर्थात् ब्रह्मचर्य्य और तप से देवताओंने मृत्यु को जीता था, ब्रह्मचर्य्य से इन्द्र देवताओं के लिए आकाशीय ज्योति प्राप्त कर सकता था। "जीवेम शरदः शतम्" हम सौ वर्ष तक जीएं।

"यथा द्यौश्च पृथिवीच न विभीतो न रिष्यतः, एवामे प्राण मा विभेः"

अर्थात् जिस तरह द्यौ और पृथ्वी न किसी से डरते हैं और न कोई इनको हानि पहुंचा सकता है इसी तरह हे मेरे प्राण ! तू कभी किसी से न डर इत्यादि

भगवान् ने गीता में कहा है ।

वासांसि जीर्णानि यथा विहाय,
नवानि गृह्णाति नरोऽपराणि ।
तथा शरीराणि बिहाय जीर्णा न्यन्यानि
संयाति नवानि देही ॥ अ० २ श्लो० २२

पुराने वस्त्रों को उतार कर जिस तरह पुरुष नये वस्त्र ग्रहण कर लेता है, उसी तरह यह आत्मा पुराने शरीरों को छोड़ कर नये शरीरों को धारण कर लेता है, यही कारण था कि कोई आर्य कभी मृत्यु से न डरता था परंच धर्म में लगा हुआ धर्म युद्ध में मर-जाना अपने लिए सौभाग्य और अच्छे जीवन के लाने वाला जानता था, अभय होने का नाम ही मृत्यु पर विजय पाना है, आर्य योगी मृत्यु को भी ठहरा सकता

है, जैसे भीष्मपितामह ने अपने श्वास दशम द्वार में खैंच कर कई महीने तक मृत्यु को रोके रक्खा था ।

यजु० अ० ४० में लिखा है ।

विद्याञ्च अविद्याञ्च यस्तद् वेद उभयं सह,
अविद्यया मृत्युं तीर्त्वा विद्यया अमृत मश्नुते

अर्थात् विद्या और अविद्या जो इन दोनों को इकठा जानता है वह अविद्या अर्थात् लौकिक विद्याओं के ज्ञान से मृत्यु को तैर कर आत्मिक ज्ञान से अमृत को प्राप्त होता है, इस लिए हर एक आर्य्य को चाहिए कि लोक और परलोक दोनों ही को जीतने का सदैव प्रयत्न करता रहे ।

२२-वेद—

आर्यों की सबसे पहली पुस्तक का नाम वेद है, सारा जगत मानता है कि ऋग्वेद संसार की लाईब्रेरी में सबसे पुरातन पुस्तक है, यह वेद मन, कर्म, वाणी, विभागानुसार अलग अलग पुस्तक रूप में संग्रह किए हुए हैं, ऋग्वेद मनुष्य के मन को ठीक करता है, यजुर्वेद उसके कर्मों को और सामवेद उसकी वाणी को मीठा बनाता है । अथर्ववेद पुरोहित का वेद है, भिन्न

भिन्न समय में ऋषियों ने इन वेदों में से अपने अपने वाञ्छित विषयों को खोजा और अनेक विषयों पर पुस्तकें लिखीं जैसे ब्राह्मणग्रन्थ, श्रौत और गृह्यसूत्र स्मृति, आरण्यक, उपनिषद्, दर्शन, इत्यादि २ तथा गणित विद्या पर बीज गणित (अलजबरा) ज्यामात्रि (जौमेटरी) धनुर्वेद, (Science of Archery) आयुर्वेद (डाक्टरी) नावविद्या अर्थात् नाव बनाने की विद्या, ज्योतिष,अर्थशास्त्र (Science of Government)शिल्प विद्या की पुस्तकें इत्यादि ।

जब दुनियां की लाइब्रेरी में ऋग्वेद सबसे पुराणी पुस्तक है तो स्पष्ट है कि दुनिया के सबसे पुराणे समय के वृत्तान्तों को जानना होतो ऋग्वेद को अवश्य खोजना चाहिये,

३–संसार का हरएक पुरुष आर्य्य बन सकता है, आर्य धर्म सब के लिए खुला है,

केवल इतना ही नहीं परञ्च हरएक आर्य्य का धर्म है कि सब संसार को आर्य्य बनाने का सदैव प्रयत्न करता रहे वेद में लिखा है—

"कृण्वन्तो विश्वमार्य्यम्,, ऋक्० मण्डल ९

अर्थात् सारे संसार को आर्य्य बनाओ ॥

head back Bran, feeling how chilled and shivering was the body against his own, settled himself more comfortably and cuddled his new acquaintance against his breast Like two motherless puppies they curled up together, black head and red head.

'What is thy name?' presently asked Bran.

'Arril And thine?'

'Bran And where dost thou come from?'

'Oh, a great way! To the Sun's Rising I—I would I were at home again!' Two tears of weakness forced themselves under Arril's eyelids

'Thou art not of these people, then?'

'No—they are of a dreadful kind In my country we have no great grey water like this I hate the bitter water!'

'I do not! I like it What is thy country like, then?'

'Oh, it is wide—wide—and covered with grass There are the great herds of our horses feeding, and my people tame them, and ride, ride all day. I had three horses of my own Oh, my Silver Star, I would I were on thy back, galloping like the wind!'

'Horses!' said Bran thoughtfully. 'I have never seen them, though Grigon told us of them But he never said that men sat upon their backs!'

'Pah!' Arril forgot his sickness in his scorn 'These folk do not know how to ride—and their horses are not worth calling horses! They only load them up and hit them with a stick But we—standing, sitting, lying—face to tail, slung under their bellies—we ride them as if we were one with them They are our brothers and sisters!'

'How didst thou come to be here, then?' Bran asked. Arril choked.

'They sold me,' he said, sniffing. 'Once a year we go down to the Big River to meet the Traders, and they give us knives and daggers and gold in exchange for cheese and wool—for we have many sheep. My father was Chief of our Tribe . . . and he went away raiding. I think Mother Kaitin was jealous for my brother Motal, for he is older than I, but *my* mother is our father's chief wife——'

'I do not understand,' said Bran, thoroughly bewildered.

Among the Fisher Folk, the rule was one man one wife. One family was deemed quite enough for a man to look after.

Arril made it clear, after a good deal of questioning, that among *his* people a man had at least two wives, and a chief would have several. His father, the chief of a large tribe, had six. Arril's own mother was the first and head wife, but her three eldest children had all been daughters. Consequently, by the time Arril was born the second wife, Kaitin, had a son in his teens. She had counted on this son succeeding to the chieftainship, and was accordingly bitterly jealous of Arril, and somehow she had contrived, when his father was away, to dispose of the unwelcome boy to the Traders who met the nomads yearly on the banks of the great river which we now call the Danube.

By the time he had made this plain to Bran, Arril was too tired to talk any more. The captain, coming to the stern half an hour later, found them both fast asleep in each other's arms, and considerately threw a cloak over them as they lay.

CHAPTER III

PIG!

THE wind had abated a good deal next day, and Arril found himself able to sit up and take a feeble interest in his surroundings. As for Bran, he was as eager as a puppy to explore the 'Big Coracle.' He hunted into every corner, ran along the bulwarks to watch the men rowing, scrambled up the prow to watch the foaming wave which ran along the ship's side as she cleft the water, and finally climbed up to the masthead and sat there, the wind whistling through his hair, singing a little wordless song of sheer delight.

While he was there he sighted another vessel similar to the one he was on, and called the news down to the captain. It proved to be one of the fleet which had been driven apart during the storm, and though the good news was none of his doing, it was considered to be a sign that he was lucky.

He was happier than he had been since his mother died. The sailors were a merry, friendly lot, and disposed to pet him for his fearlessness. Even when he got under the captain's feet and was trodden on, he only had a storm of curses and a cuff on the head as punishment, and knew perfectly well that it was only a minute's annoyance and not done in malice.

He spent most of his time, however, with Arril, and the two boys exchanged tales of their home life just as boys do nowadays. One could hardly imagine anything more different than their upbringing.

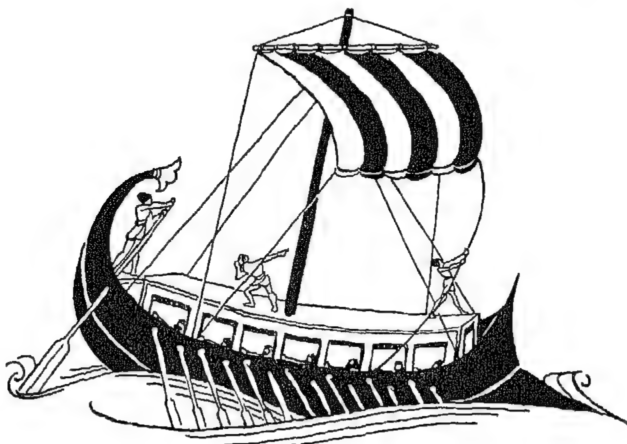
Arril told of great plains, burning hot in summer and covered with snow in winter; of a blaze of flowers in spring, of great roofed wagons in which the women and children rode, while the men and boys—and many of the girls too—galloped and pranced and cavorted upon the swift, spirited horses He told, too, of great flocks of sheep and goats, from which they got wool for clothing and milk for cheeses, of shooting wild-fowl with bow and arrow, of the herds of aurochs that roamed the plain, and the exciting hunts when the scouts brought news of one of these It was a glorious, wind-blown life of wide spaces, and the tears came into the boy's eyes as he remembered that he was now a slave, going he knew not whither, in strange unknown lands

It seemed that the Traders who first bought him had taken him on their route westward up the river, passing to the north of the Alps Finally they had struck the route of the north-going Traders who followed the Rhône valley, and he had been handed over to them, and so had passed into the hands of the sea-going merchants, where Bran had found him

Then Bran told of the rocks and cliffs, of the crying gulls and the hairbreadth scrambles after eggs, of the lobsters and prawns and crabs and mussels he caught among the rocks, and the wicker pots he made for traps; of the skin-covered coracles, and how they were shaped with frames of pliant willow, how the men would even venture out to sea in the larger ones, and when times were good bring home great catches of herring and whiting and cod How they dried them for the winter, and traded them for grain with the inland folks, and how pleasant it was in summer

to splash and dive in the blue water, to shoot head-first off a rock into a deep pool, and then to lie out basking in the sun.

But he did not want to go back, nevertheless Whatever might happen to him when they sold him as a slave in that Isle of Mists to which they were



The 'Big Coracles'

going, it could not be worse than the life of toil and beating and cruelty which he had left behind

The two boys were as unlike in appearance as in history Arril was not quite so tall as Bran, but looked taller, being very slim and light and sinewy, brown and smooth all over, with a pointed face and narrow slits of eyes, jet-black. His hair was jet-black too, and very long and straight He said that the men of his tribe coiled their hair up in great knots under their skin caps, and it was their great pride

to keep it smooth and greasy with butter He was very bothered about his own hair, which was tangled and matted with sea-water Bran had never thought of such a thing as combing his hair, but when he saw how his new friend was distressed, he borrowed a comb from one of the sailors and teased out the black locks with the help of his fingers into some sort of order.

Then Arril insisted on doing the same for him, while the men roared with laughter But Bran's hair, which had been kept short with a knife, was coarse and curly and immensely thick, and Arril could not do it to his satisfaction It persisted in looking like the mane of a young lion, and at last Bran gave his head a toss and declared that *he* wasn't going to be tortured any longer, and have tears brought to his eyes. The sailors would think he was a baby!

Boat by boat the fleet assembled during that day, until there were six ships in all The storm had blown itself out by evening, and the sun came out in a flood of golden light that turned to crimson and promised well for next day

The men gathered round the glowing brazier and ate porridge with meat in, a generous share of which was given to the children Then songs were sung and tales told, while the stars came out above and the water lapped gently against the vessel's side and lifted her up and down tenderly, just as if it had never tossed and battered it with fury, and put the fear of death into those on board! And Arril and Bran went to sleep in each other's arms as before, and woke to a glorious golden autumn morning.

Woke, moreover, to a shout from the sailors and

a pointing that told them something was afoot Bran jumped up, pushing his hair out of his eyes, and ran along the side of the ship to the prow. Arril, who had not quite got his sea legs, followed more carefully. There, ahead of them, clear in the morning light, lay a long blue cloud with a jagged edge—land! The Isle of Mists!

It was what is now Cornwall, and the blue cloud was the Lizard Head. A modern steamer would have reached it in an hour, but what wind there was blew from the north-west, dead against the Traders, who had to depend on their oars However, they pulled with a will, and slowly the cloud increased in size and clearness, until Bran could make out the rocks and the line of white water at their base.

Then they swung out further west, and rounded the ness into Mount's Bay, where St Michael's Mount stands up from the restless waters There was a fort crowning it even then; a beehive-shaped affair of rough stones, looking so much part of the place that you would think it had grown out of the rock A crowd had assembled to welcome the Trading Fleet

There was the usual shouting and yelling as the boats were moored, and the bales of goods passed from one to the other and tossed ashore, finally, on to a low jetty of piled stone that ran out a little way into the bay The men heaved and pulled and backed water, the captains shouted commands and curses, ropes slipped and fell into the sea, bales rolled, men heaved and panted and sweated, and Arril and Bran prudently crept into a corner lest they should be trodden on But the ships were at last brought to anchor, the men shipped their oars, stood up and stretched and shouted to their

acquaintances ashore, and the two boys were called up by the captain and bidden jump on land.

They found now that they were not the only slaves. The other boats had turned out between them a group of perhaps a dozen more, boys ranging from about fifteen to eighteen. Some sullen, some defiant, some merely cowed and dull. There was no regular slave trade in those days, war captives who seemed likely to be docile, women raided from a coast village by pirates, and a few lads like Bran and Airil, who were considered to make too many mouths to feed in time of scarcity, might be handed over to the Traders for a few shells or pelts to dispose of if they could. Otherwise men did their own work.

'Ho!' said one of the onlookers, as the two children stood together, bewildered and rather nervous. 'In what net did you catch that small fry?'

'Why, one of them I got off the Pack Folk, where they had him I know not. He 's quick enough, but the sea suits him not. As for this other'—he gave Bran's shoulder a push—'we hauled him up out of a nutshell half dead, and he tells us he was coming to seek us!'

There was a shout of laughter at this, and the captain went on:

'It 's a nimble and plucky lad, whatever his tale. 'Tell ye, whoever gets him will have a good bargain, for he 'll grow into a strong man and a skilful, and I 'm selling him good cheap because he 's young.'

'A-well, we 'll see them to-morrow, when the sickness of the sea 's worn off them. Come ye up now to the fort, where there is mead waiting ye all—and good roast pig, and oysters!'

'Oysters!' cried the Chief Captain — he who

commanded the largest boat. 'Aha! All your tin and your copper, your jet and your pearls, are light in the balance compared with your oysters, the bonny plump oysters of the Misty Isles!'

From which it will be seen that the Chief Captain was a greedy man.

The captain of the ship that had rescued Bran, however, had a care for his goods. He made a great fuss about the disposal of the bales in a safe dry place, and then himself inspected the hut in which the slaves were to be lodged for the night.

'It 's not clean enough,' he stormed. 'What think ye? Here are the creatures just off a voyage, and most of 'em never set eyes on the sea afore, and their stomachs as shaky as water will make 'em—and ye shove 'em in a stinking sty with filthy straw and foul water—I know your tricks! Ye would have 'em wan and sickly the morn, that ye may beat down the prices! But I 'm even with ye! Clean straw, say I, and pure water, and food that is fairly cooked, or I 'll never bring my ship into your bay again!'

It will be seen that the good captain looked upon his slaves as so much live-stock, and rather from the point of view of having them in good trim for the sale to-morrow than from kindness to them as human beings. However, the result was good, and they were made decently comfortable with sweet straw, fresh water, and good food, in a round stone hut below the fort.

But over the food trouble arose. A roasted pig was brought in, hacked to pieces with a large knife, and the portions tossed to the slaves to gnaw. As soon as he saw it Arril began to tremble violently.

'Pig! They eat pig!' he exclaimed in tones of horror

'Why not?' asked Bran indifferently, eagerly watching for his share

'But it is unclean! It is taboo! It is a curse to touch it! Even the Pack Folk who took me away, they never touched pig!'

'It is very good food,' replied Bran, setting his teeth in the piece that had been thrown to him 'Try thou, Arril, and thou 'lt see——'

But Arril sprang up, raging and shivering By this time everybody in the hut turned to see what was the matter

'Take it away! Take it away!' screamed Arril 'If I touch it, my teeth will drop out and my fingers wither off——'

Bran stopped eating in some consternation. He had not tasted pork before, as it was not a food that came the way of the Fisher Folk, so he did not know but that what Arril said might be true

'But that is foolishness,' grunted one of the slaves, who came from a forest district 'I and all my people eat pig; and we keep great herds of them None of our teeth have dropped out'

'I have heard of it,' said the man who had brought the food 'There are one or two yet of the Old Ones who eat no pig. Now among *my* people we do not eat hare Not because it is unclean, but because it is sacred, which is a much better reason For look you, the Moon Goddess puts a madness on them in the Moon of Winds, which shows that they are hers. Well, here 's bread for all of ye, and two pieces for little Black Locks, since he chooses to think good food is unclean'

He went out, and for a little quiet reigned as the slaves gnawed and crunched Arril had recovered

himself, and sat down to munch his oaten cake hungrily, for he was feeling much better now that he had got on firm ground.

But his troubles were not yet over. One of the captives, a big boy of sixteen with a low forehead and small eyes, finished his food and looked round for some amusement. As his glance fell on Arril he seemed to have an idea.

'He says his teeth will fall out if he touches pig!' cried the lout, pointing. 'Let 's see them fall, youngster.'

Arril looked up with a start, and a pig's trotter caught him full in the face. He threw up an arm with a frightened cry.

'What, has one gone? Then we 'll have another,' shouted the bully. The others were interested now, and began to hunt for bits of bone, skin, and so forth that they had dropped in the straw.

Arril sprang up and cowered against the wall of the hut. There is nothing more dreadful than the fear of taboo, the thing magically forbidden, and the poor boy went nearly mad with terror as pieces of the 'unclean animal' began to strike his head and arms, sometimes so hard and sharply as to draw blood. But it was not the pain that he minded.

'Stop that!' Bran got to his feet indignantly, though he did not understand what was upsetting his friend so. 'Let him alone! Or throw at me if ye like. I do not mind.'

But there was no fun in pelting a fellow who did not mind, so the boys went on tormenting Arril, whereupon Bran threw himself in front of his friend and covered the shrinking figure with his own sturdy body. This was spoiling sport, the others felt, and

they started to pull him off. But Bran bit and scratched and kicked like fifteen furies, and then screamed at the top of his voice

Arril recovered himself and bit also. Two of the slaves, inclined to take the part of the small boys, first protested and then, finding no notice was taken of them, put in a cuff and a kick or two on their own account The hut was in an uproar

Then running feet were heard on the stones outside, the skin that covered the doorway was pushed aside, and an angry voice demanded

'What is all this? Be silent, all of ye!' and a long-lashed whip curled on the backs of those nearest to the door

The struggling group fell apart, and Arril and Bran much bruised, torn and bleeding, picked themselves up from the floor and panted

'They threw pig at me!' Arril complained

'They did that,' Bran confirmed him And they both waited to see what would happen

'All of them?' asked the guard, fingering his long whip

At that everybody cried out, protesting that it was not they—that they had only interfered to keep the peace The guard was perplexed

'Well,' he said at length, 'ye two'—indicating Bran and Arril—'shall tell your story to the captains It is for them to say what shall be done'

So the boys were marched up to the fort, where the captains and chiefs and headmen who had gathered for the trading sat on long wooden benches before tables of pine, and drank mead out of great horns banded with copper. The floor was strewn with cracked bones, the remnants of their feast.

The overseer told the story, which provoked a good deal of laughter Only one grizzled old headman from an inland village, short and slim and sinewy, frowned thoughtfully under shaggy eyebrows and did not smile

The result of it was that the other slaves got twelve lashes each indiscriminately, for in the scuffle Bran and Arril had not been able to distinguish friend from foe The two boys were put into another hut to sleep, and congratulated themselves on having come out on top that time But it was not the end of the affair by any means

CHAPTER IV

AMBALLO

THE captains wanted to be off the next day, as the wind was fair So the sailors worked at lading the ship with stores, filling the water-skins, and generally making things shipshape for the long voyage The bales of merchandise were spread out in front of the fort, and groups of men in dyed woollen tunics and fur cloaks, and a few women with great copper bracelets on their arms, chaffered and bargained through the morning Pelts of wolf and bear and beaver were exchanged for fine dyed purple cloth, beads of glass and porcelain, and shells, but the folk of the Isle of Mists paid chiefly in ingots of tin and copper, ready smelted to a serviceable shape and size For this was the wealth of the hills

A little way off the slaves were stood near to a block of stone, and one by one were called upon to stand on this and show themselves off The captain of Bran's ship, who was in charge of the sale, shouted out all their best points to the crowd, made them stretch their arms to show their muscles, bend their knees and inflate their chests

But the trouble of the night before had made a bad impression. Folk were not inclined to offer much for a rowdy lot of slaves, and the bidding did not go very high. In twos and threes, or singly, they were disposed of, and their new masters called them aside and told them off to carry bundles and packs, or merely to stand and wait for orders

Then the captain lifted Bran up on the block His

tawny hair had been combed out and his brown body washed, and in spite of cuts and bruises gained the night before he looked ruddy and fresh. He was not much troubled by what might happen to him, and stared round interestedly at the crowd

'What 's the use of that acorn?' demanded someone

'The acorn will grow to be an oak,' retorted the captain amid laughter 'Come now, who bids for a brisk strong lad, a clever handy lad that can paddle a coracle and catch you lobsters by the score? He won't cost you much in food——'

'Won't he?' came a sour voice 'I know that sort. They eat their weight in barley-bread, and if you set them fishing, what 's to prevent their swallowing half the catch?'

It did not look as though any one wanted Bran, and the captain was about to lift him off the block when the grizzled Headman who had not laughed the night before came up to them and peered at the boy under his brows.

'Show 's thy hand, lad,' he said Bran stretched out his square freckled paw, wondering The old man felt the fingers, prodding at the pads at their tips and examining their shape

'Craftsman's hand, craftsman's hand,' he muttered in his beard 'Ay—hm We 'll see—we 'll see.' Then turning to the captain he said shortly, 'Put the black-haired slip beside him and I 'll take the two.'

'If one boy from the gods know where were not enough, what do you want with two, Amballo?' A man, one evidently who knew him well, plucked the Headman by the cloak 'What use will that wild-eyed slip be to you?'

'He eats not pig,' returned Amballo 'It is long

since I met any of the old faith. Last night I dreamed of a boy who would bring me luck, Moran.'

'Humph!' snorted Moran dubiously, but did not protest any more Arril and Bran, mightily pleased to be together, were sold to Amballo for a dagger of bronze, and the captain seemed mightily pleased with his bargain He examined its edges with great content, and was seen showing it off to his friends with an air of having got the best of it It was plain, on the other hand, that Amballo's party thought him an extravagant fool Moran had bought the boy—Garm his name was—who had begun to tease Arril the night before, and he was disposed to brag of his purchase

'A big lad, see thou, that can wield a pick in the mines and carry a weight with any one But thy two pigmies—they may die in the cold weather or choke in the mists before ever thou hast any use of them'

'Look thee, Moran,' said Amballo, bending his brows on his companion, 'I 'll tell thee this There 's more luck coming to me from these children, pigmies though thou call'st them, than thou 'lt have from thy Garm Through him comes evil, a great sorrow, and a red mist on the land I say it who have the Sight'

'Thou art of the Strange Folk,' said Moran unbelievingly, 'and such were ever jealous'

'And was not thy mother also of the Strange Folk, as thou callest us?' demanded Amballo. 'Thou shouldest know better'

'My father's folk were in the land before ever thine came over the sea,' muttered Moran, 'and it is ours by rights'

Bran heard all this without understanding it, but he realized one thing at least For some reason

Moran was jealous of Amballo He also gathered, from further talk that he overheard as they followed their new master down the hill, that Amballo was a bronze-smith, and a very famous one at that, and Bran's heart gave a throb of excitement Of all things he longed most to see the actual working of that wonderful tough and beautiful metal, of which such lovely things could be wrought Now he would have the chance

He said as much to Arril, who was not in the least impressed His fingers, he said, did not itch to make things They were formed for the bow and the javelin, just as the grip of his knees were made for the backs of horses And he wanted to go home

They had come round the hill now to the side that faced inland, and here Arril gave a start and a cry of surprise. The sea that had surrounded the Mount, making it an island on the day they came, was gone down now and left bare a gleaming rocky causeway leading to the mainland, and at the end of this were grouped men and oxen and small wagons, waiting to cross

'What is this magic?' Arril gasped, clutching at Bran's arm 'Where has the water gone?'

'It is the tide,' answered Bran unconcernedly. 'Hast thou never seen it? But of course not Twice a day Sea-Mother draws the water in her net and piles it high upon the land, and twice a day she draws it back again So says old Wara '

'I see ' The explanation perfectly satisfied Arril, and indeed it was easier to understand than the ones wise men give nowadays

They had come down to the wagons, which were much like a modern farm-cart, but unpainted, and

the wheels had no spokes, but were made from solid boards put together

Amballo and Moran, with two or three others of their party, piled up one of the wagons with their purchases Then one of the men seized the near ox by the rope that went round its head, another cracked a whip, and the heavy cart rumbled off, creaking and groaning, while its owners trudged behind. Two or three wagons were already on the causeway, several more were behind, so that the whole length between Mount and mainland was covered by the procession Every one wanted to be across before the tide turned, and shouts and yells and cracking of whips filled the air and echoed back from the hills beyond

Over the isthmus and up a rough and rutted track the wagons surged, but after a little the track split up, and some of the wagons rolled away from the main body Several turned east and followed the coast, one went due north, but two or three, including that of Amballo's party, held on north-eastward, mounting and mounting over wild moorland, rough, boulder-strewn country akin to that from which Bran had come

It was a grey day, and as they climbed, mist and a thin fine rain swept down on them The road was full of holes, and neither Arril nor Bran was used to much walking, so that it was no wonder that their legs ached, their breath came in sobs, and they stumbled often Nobody took much notice of them, and though Garm walked near, he was too cowed by last night's whipping to interfere with the boys. But his eyes gleamed evilly and showed that he would dearly have enjoyed tormenting them.

Presently the travellers came to a village of grey stone huts, thatched with heather and walled round about, and here they were greeted by a shout of welcome. It was the home of one of the wagon parties, and the Headman was eager to exchange news with the folk of the other villages, also to send a message or two to friends and relations further inland.

Bran and Arril sank to the ground, too weary to notice anything that was happening round them. Talk and laughter and shouting of children, barking of dogs and bleating of goats passed over them like noises heard in a dream, until Amballo gave the signal to go on. He intended to reach a further village before making camp for the night.

Someone shook Arril by the shoulder, and he got on to his feet, swaying, but sank down again. Then Bran struggled up, feeling as though he could not stir a step, and Arril, clinging to his arm, tried again. Amballo watched them.

'Into the wagon with them!' he commanded, and strong arms hoisted the exhausted children in amongst the packs and bales. Moran laughed.

'What did I say?' he jeered. 'They will be dead before thou get'st them home.'

Amballo deigned no reply. As for Bran and Arril, they were already asleep.

It was black night when they awakened, and the wagon was still. Sitting up cautiously they peered over the edge and saw a camp fire, and men lying about it wrapped in cloaks, fast asleep. Occasional flickers of light showed a stone wall on one side, and on the other the dark doorway of a hut, so they guessed that they were inside another village.

'Wow!' Bran whispered, 'but I am hungry!'

'And I!' Arril answered 'I have a pain here'—he laid his hand just below his ribs—'with emptiness'

'I think they have forgotten us,' said Bran

'Then could we not escape?' Arril forgot his hunger in eagerness

'Little fool,' Bran said contemptuously 'Is there not the sea between us and the world? And how couldst thou find thy way to thy home, so many days' travel toward the sun's rising?'

'I forgot the sea.' Arril's desire to escape was chilled 'No—I do not wish to be sick again'

'Hush!' exclaimed Bran suddenly 'Someone is moving'

A man who had been sitting beyond the fire, his dark cloak about him and his hood drawn over his head, now stirred and came towards them

'We shall be beaten,' Bran whispered

'Then I will bite,' Arril declared 'No one is to beat me save my father——'

'Ye are lively enough now, little chatterers,' said the man in a low tone His head appeared above the wagon, and they could make out that it was Amballo He did not look angry On the contrary, there was a kind of eagerness about him as, setting his foot on the wheel, he clambered over the side and sat down beside the boys

'I 'll warrant ye are hungry,' he added, pulling out meat and bread from under his cloak

It should be explained here that whenever 'bread' is mentioned in this story, it does not mean anything like the fine close slices, either white or brown, which we see on our tables to-day It was rough and gritty, made of rye coarsely crushed with a stone roller, mixed with water and sometimes a little

honey, and baked on hot stones. Excellent for the teeth and satisfying to the stomach.'

Arril looked doubtfully at his meat, but Amballo reassured him.

'It is not pig,' he said. 'Eat away. Nay,' he went on, settling himself more comfortably, as the boys bit ravenously into the food, 'never have I touched pig, nor my father, nor my father's father. It is taboo. I am not of the First Folk. Long ago, and very long ago, my people came to this land in ships.'

Bran cocked an interested ear.

'There is a city,' Amballo continued, 'far towards the noonday sun, on the borders of the Sea-that-is-in-the-Middle-of-the-Earth. Our people built it when they came from the Land of the Sun's Awaking. For my people have been great sailors from the beginning, and are the children of Ea, God of the Sea. They sailed from the Land of the Sun's Awaking because they were too many for it, and they tell many tales—many, many tales—of their wanderings. They sailed on the Sea-that-is-in-the-Middle-of-the-Earth, and they built cities with great harbours. At last they sailed out of the sea between two mountains, and came to a land whose hills are silver.'

The boys were listening with all their ears now, thrilled by something in the old man's voice, and seeing visions of the early adventurers from Phoenicia, sailing westwards in their beaked ships along the Mediterranean, to Spain, the Land of Silver.

'And there,' Amballo continued, 'the world stopped. There was no more land at all, but only sea. So my people built a city there, and made mines for the silver, and the Folk of the Land worked for them. But, though silver is rare and beautiful,

it is too soft to be used for tools and weapons; and the land of tin and copper—the white and the red metals that make the bright, hard bronze—they had left far behind them to the Rising of the Sun So they sent their ships along the coast of that Land of Silver, into the Cold Places, where the wind is bitter and the folk fierce and wild There they found that the land bent again towards the Sun's Awaking, and they thought that perhaps they might sail round it and return But no! Once again the land bent away from the sun, and the coast stretched away and away into the cold And the storms swept down upon the ships, and some were lost, and my people thought to turn and go back to the Land of Silver, for here there was nothing to be got save death '

'But they went on!' cried Bran, breathless with excitement

'Yes, they went on,' Amballo said proudly 'For, look you, Ea of the Ocean had them in his care And here he sent strange men to meet them, men who paddled little boats like baskets covered with skin——'

'Oh!' exclaimed Bran, recognizing the coracles with a jump

'And,' continued Amballo, 'these men had on their arms bands both of the red and the white metal But their weapons and their tools were of stone and horn, for they knew nothing of the smelting of the metals, or the mingling of them which makes them hard. What they found they hammered cold, and prized it for its beauty But my folk, who are skilled in the working, asked of these folk whence they came, and where they got the metals And when we had given them presents, they told us

'Wert thou there?' Bran had got confused by Amballo's long speech

'Nay, nay, it was long before ever I was born But my grandfather's father's grandfather's grandfather was there—and so I said "we" Well—so my people followed this wild folk across a stormy sea—even this sea that ye have crossed—and came here to the Isle of Mists And it was even as the Wild Folk had said—there was copper in the surface rocks, and tin for the digging. So some of my people stayed, and taught the Wild Folk to mine for them, while others sailed back to the Land of Silver and told those that they had left So many of us came to this Isle, and settled here, and our ships come year by year and bring away the tin and the copper in exchange for dyed stuffs and gold and shells And I have never seen my own country, nor did my grandfather's grandfather And some of my folk have married with the First Folk, and are of mixed blood, like Moran here And they eat of the pig which none of our fathers did, and surely trouble will come because of it Indeed I think it has come already'

'How?' asked Arril, interested in his turn.

'A strange people, tall, with yellow hair, have come over the sea to the parts of this Isle that lie to the Sun's Awaking, and they spread over the land They are a fierce folk, a fighting folk, and my people are men of peace So they take the land from us They are a people who eat the pig, the Sacred Beast And no doubt they are sent upon us for a punishment. But I—I remember the gods of my fathers Now thou'—he touched Arril—'thou art of a people that eats not the pig, is it not?'

Arril nodded Amballo took him by the chin, and by the dim firelight looked at him long and searchingly.

'No,' he said at last, 'thou art not of my people, for we are high in the nose, and large in the eye, and narrow in the face, and thou hast but little nose, and thine eyes are small and set slanting, and thy face is broad in the cheek and pointed in the chin Nevertheless, thou comest from the Sun's Awaking, and it may be that thou hast met my people, and they have taught thine not to eat the pig I do not know But because of this I have bought thee I will teach thee all I know, and I am the first of the bronze-smiths I have no son to follow me—it may be that I will make thee my son Wilt thou be faithful?'

'Surely I will be faithful,' said Arril, but he said it carelessly, as if the words meant nothing to him He did not wish in the least to learn how to work bronze

But Bran ached with longing that Amballo had said as much to him For all that the old man took no further notice of him, but, after looking long and hard at Arril, sighed and went away The two boys presently settled back to sleep

CHAPTER V

THE SMITHY

It was quite clear in the days that followed which of the two boys was Amballo's favourite Arril might ride in the wagon all day long if he liked, and was even beginning to be mildly cheeky to his master, in a friendly way, without provoking any kind of reproof. Indeed, the old man seemed to like it, for he smiled and sometimes chaffed his small slave. Nobody took any notice of Bran, on the contrary, though no one was unkind to him He could ride on the wagon towards evening, and he was always well fed He grew to like the travel, however, and as he became used to it would walk for longer and longer stretches, sniffing the good, sea-salted, upland air and looking at everything with the interest of a puppy

They passed occasionally gangs of men with picks, hard at work quarrying, and from their talk he gathered that they were getting copper ore. Sometimes, too, he would see a pit going down into the earth, dark and mysterious, and heard voices and the ring of metal from the depths These, he learned, were tin mines, and he would very much have liked to have gone down one of those rope ladders to see what it was like; but the wagon rolled away and he had to follow

Five days they tramped on, along a track that ran the length of the Cornish moors, and ended their long trek at last at the grey walls of a village on a hillside overlooking a little valley so thickly forested that it seemed like a green lake.

Thick and high the wall was, and the village was larger than any they had passed, indeed, for those days it was reckoned a small town In time of war all the folk of the countryside gathered into its shelter, and every winter it was besieged by the hungry wolves of the forest

Here the wagon was up-ended, and the oxen turned out to grass. Amballo, Moran, and the others displayed the results of their barter to the rest of the village, and the goods changed hands yet again.

Amballo was Headman of this village, and the other villages for about twenty miles round acknowledged in some measure his authority. This was mainly because he was the skilfullest smith that had ever been known, and his fame was known far and wide Even the fair-haired Celtic chiefs who were spreading over the land and pushing back the small, dark First Folk thought themselves lucky to be able to buy sword or knife from Amballo

There were goats and a few sheep belonging to the villagers together with the oxen that were used for hauling Horses they had not, though there were plenty wild on the moor, for they found them more difficult to tame and less docile than the oxen There were scrubby little patches of cultivated land outside the walls, where rye and barley was raised, and a few root vegetables But for the most part the Moor Folk paid for seed-corn, flax, fish, and the gold and shells they used for charms and ornaments, with the ingots of copper and tin and the bronze tools and weapons that they wrought of them

The day after their arrival the boys were taken down to the smithy Amballo had set up his forge in the wood by the stream, where fuel was plentiful,

and had built around it a little stockade, for he was very jealous of the secrets of his craft. A little way up the stream was Moran's smithy, likewise guarded, and the workmen of the rival smiths never ventured to set foot inside the domains of each other.

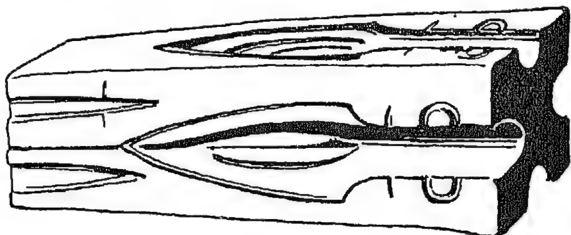
As they walked down, men from the village followed, laden with baskets full of the broken ore. This was dumped just inside the stockade, and then all save two young men took their leave and went back There was a stone hut in the clearing, which was Amballo's workshop, and outside it two or three pits were dug in the earth for the furnaces which should separate the metal from the ores. No smoke went up either from the pits or the workshop, for Amballo had been absent for several days, and the spiders had spun silvery webs across the doorway and the mouths of the holes.

'Go fetch wood,' the smith commanded the boys, and glad to be doing something they scampered out into the forest. Dry twigs and branches they brought up first, while one of the workmen kindled fire from flint and ironstone that he took from a pouch at his belt Soon a black smoke poured from the pit's mouth, heavier wood was put on, and presently a red flame shot up. The boys and the workmen fed the fire until it was blazing and the inside of the pit red-hot They fanned it with leathern bellows whose nozzles were of clay, which they opened and closed by means of two long sticks When Amballo judged that the furnace was hot enough, the ores were cast in, one pit was for tin and one for copper, since tin melts more readily.

Then Amballo led the boys into his workshop, and

told them to kindle fire on the stone hearth in the centre Here were the bronze-smith's tools, the slab of stone which was his table, his pincers, hammers, chisels, and gouges, the tiny anvil for fine work, and moulds of stone for spearheads, axes, and knives Ingots of tin and copper were here too, ready to be smelted, and over the hearth swung clay pots or crucibles in which the metals were mingled before casting

Bran eagerly went to work. He was thoroughly keen and excited, and had his flame kindled and was



ready for Arril's fuel before the other boy had time to collect more than a stick or two from the pile laid ready in a corner. The fire blazed up

Amballo pointed to a pair of bellows like the ones being used outside

'Blow,' he said shortly, and Arril and Bran took each a stick and alternately raised and lowered it until the wood had caught well and the centre of the fire was a red glow. Then charcoal was added, until there was little flame but great heat, and Amballo dropped pieces of copper into the crucible

Bran, whose sharp eyes seldom missed anything, noticed that the smith had sorted out lumps of metal of more or less equal size, and piled them handily by

the hearth Nine of copper went to one of tin, and Bran wondered why this should be so. Meanwhile he blew with all his might.

The heat inside the hut was becoming terrific, and sweat soon streamed down the boys' bodies

'It is such hard work!' presently complained Arril.

'It is that!' Bran grinned in answer But the lumps



Amballo

in the pot were beginning to look soft like putty, and little streams flowed blobbily down the sides

'Look!' Bran laughed, 'they are sweating like us!'

'My arms ache!' was all Arril answered He was not interested in what he was doing, and wanted to get outside into the cool air By and by he dropped his stick and leaned against the wall

'What is it?' asked Amballo, who was intent on his melting-pot. 'Why hast stopped?'

'The heat makes me sick,' said Arril

'Go outside then, and rest The heat is up enough, if thou, Bran, keep'st blowing at whiles '

'Oh, ay, I 'll keep blowing!' Bran dashed the sweat from the end of his nose What a pity poor Arril could not stick it out, just when things were beginning to be so fascinating! He was full of sympathy for his comrade, sympathy that was quite wasted, for Arril, young rogue, cared not two straws for bronze-making, and was thoroughly pleased that his little scheme had worked

Bran blew and blew, and the mass in the pot turned to a treacly substance which Amballo stirred with a green birch rod, and then added the tin He sang as he stirred, a queer, deep-throated, wavering tune that never seemed to stop Bran could not make out the words The smith seemed to measure the stirring by the tune, for on a certain note he drew out the green rod, dipped up a little of the molten metal and plunged it into a wide-mouthed water-pot. It hissed and bubbled, and presently Amballo drew it out, set nearly hard, took it in a pair of pincers and chopped it smartly in two He examined the broken parts with care, nodded as if satisfied, and began another song

'Give a hand, lad,' he said, when this was ended, as he thrust a pole through the handle of the crucible Bran took one end, and together they swung the pot off the fire and tipped the molten metal into one after another of the moulds on the slab Then Amballo bent over them, pushed with a stick a particle that had got stuck, and for the first time seemed to notice that Bran was dropping with weariness

'Outside and rest, boy,' he said kindly, and Bran staggered outside and dropped thankfully on a patch of green grass

Arril, who was sitting dangling his feet in the little stream that flowed past the bottom of the enclosure, called to him

'Why didst thou stay so long?'

'Because I could,' Bran answered with a look of surprise 'I could have done more—but I 'm glad to be out for a while Presently I go back Art better now?'

'I 'm well enough—but not well enough to go back to work'

'Arril, thou little wicked one!' Bran got up and came over to his friend 'What will Amballo say? He 'll not feed thee unless thou pay him in work'

'I 'll pay him some other way. Let him give me bow and arrows, and I 'll shoot birds for him. Would they kept horses in this evil land!'

'But dost thou not like the bronze forging?' Bran could hardly believe this to be possible.

'Why, no, I hate it! Dost thou not hate it?'

'It is the best thing ever I have seen!' declared Bran enthusiastically. 'I 'll be a bronze-smith when I am grown'

'If Amballo will let thee. Thou art not among thine own people'

'I will watch him, and so learn.'

'Wah! They 'll not let thee touch the work, mark my words. They 'll keep thee fetching wood and blowing bellows for ever. But no matter. Look, I 've found some nuts. Art thou not hungry?'

The two boys sat and champed at the hazel nuts, Arril kicking his feet carelessly and throwing stones into the water, Bran turning over in his mind what Arril had just said, until Amballo shouted to them to come in and blow again.

Arril came back this time, and blew alternately with Bran—one, two—one, two—for perhaps an hour. Then he complained of feeling sick again and slipped outside. Bran went on blowing.

Amballo was hammering at a spearhead which had been rough-cast earlier. Bronze, unlike iron, is best hammered cold, and Amballo's tools sounded a merry tune with which his voice blended as he sang. Bing, bong! Bing, bong! Bing, bong! All down the edge and back again, till it was as thin as a razor and harder far than iron. The spear had a strong ridge up the middle to take the weight of the thrust, a hollow base into which the shaft would be set, and a couple of holes in the base through which a bronze pin would rivet it to the wood. Amballo had discarded the earlier method, of making holes in the spear blade to pass thongs through. He depended rather on the neatness of his fitting to make the head hold firmly.

Bran wished he could see better as his master's deft hands wrought, resting the weapon on the tiny anvil. But he could only catch an occasional glimpse as he passed to and fro for more wood.

Going outside presently for a breath of fresh air, he saw that the men tending the outside furnaces had let the fire die down, and lumps of the purified metal could be seen among the slag. Presently these were raked out from the ashes and laid to cool in the grass before being taken into the workshop to be wrought.

Bran sighed with mingled pleasure and weariness as he turned back to the forge. He was aching in every limb, his eyes smarted with the smoke, and he had a burn on his wrist where he had incautiously handled a flaming log. But life promised to be far more thrilling than anything he had ever known.

CHAPTER VI

ARRIL'S SHOOTING

WINTER was now coming on, but though the mists gathered and the wind blew cold across the moor, so far to the south-west the weather was not often very bitter. Arril was used to much more severe weather, and he told Bran how his people were in the habit of digging themselves in when the snow came, and did not stir abroad unless it was absolutely necessary The snow, he said, would drift over their dwellings so that they had to make long tunnels in it by which to get out, and they depended altogether on their stores of cheese and dried flesh to carry them through till spring

Work in the smithy continued irregularly. There would be a rush of work when the ores came from the mines, furnaces blazing late into the night, and every one working at top speed Then there would be a lull, and the men would go hunting, or hold sports, or simply hang about and gossip

The boys had little chance of being idle If there was not work to do in the smithy, there was wood to be carried up to the village, water to be fetched, and a thousand and one odd jobs for the women

This was the time when careful mothers spent long hours at the loom, those tall upright looms that were fixed into the corner of every hut Here the woollen yarn, dyed red or blue or brown with dyes gathered on moor or forest, was stretched over a beam supported by two forked posts, and weighted to keep it

taut with clay balls. Two sticks thrust crosswise opened the shed, and they worked two by two, passing the shuttle from one to the other

All the summer they had spun the yarn, carrying their distaffs under their arm wherever they went, their busy fingers drawing out the thread from the bunch of wool tied to the top of the stick, twisting deftly, the spindle-whorl at the end swinging and twirling. As often as not there was a baby perched astride of their left hip, supported by the arm which held the distaff Little girls span as they minded goats or babies, and you never saw a group of women standing chattering in the doorway of a hut, but you saw also those never-wearying fingers spinning, spinning, spinning.

Bran, who was interested in the making of anything, poked his snub nose into any hut where he was allowed and watched the weaving But for the most part the women did not want boys indoors, least of all slave boys, and Bran was shooed out as if he had been an intrusive kid

He and Arril spent most of their scant free time together. The children of the village generally took no notice of them, but went off in groups on expeditions of their own, or played games which the strangers did not understand

One blustery winter's day, when the wind howled among the huts and flapped the skins which hung before the doors, driving in gusts of sleet and blowing the smoke into everybody's eyes, Bran found Arril curled up in the corner of an empty and half-ruined hut (its former owner had died, and it was considered unlucky to use it again as it stood) Arril was extremely busy with a knife and a long strip of wood.

'What makest thou?' inquired Bran, snuggling in beside him to get out of the cold.

'Art blind?' was all that the busy Arril would say.

It was a well-seasoned piece of ash wood at which Arril was whittling. He had split the staff lengthways and tapered down the ends, leaving a pleasant little outward curl. Just now he was thinning down the middle, testing it every now and then for a handgrip, and bending it to an arc to see if it were flexible.

'Ohé, a bow!' exclaimed Bran. 'Who gave thee the wood?'

'I took it,' said Arril, with a sidelong glance.

'Will not Goltar be angry?' Goltar was the chief hunter of the village.

'Not when I bring him a hare or so, or maybe a clacking-bird.' He meant a grouse.

'But what hast thou for arrowheads?'

'Sticks hardened in the fire, mostly. And look——' He put his hand in his pouch and drew out two beautiful flint arrowheads. Flint was still found to be the most useful substance for such small things. 'Goltar went shooting a while ago, and I went with him to fetch the game. Two arrows he shot into the bushes, and I said I could not find them. But I did.' He chuckled wickedly.

'Arril!' Bran gasped. 'Thou wilt certainly be beaten.'

'I do not think so,' Arril laughed. 'Old Amballo loves me. He will not let me be beaten.'

'One day,' said Bran seriously, 'thou wilt go too far, and Amballo will be very angry.'

'By that time,' Arril answered, 'I shall be too great a chief for him to beat me. Why not? This is a

land of foolish folk They cannot ride, and their best archer is a bungler who loses two arrows out of four They do not know what they can hit or cannot Now among my people we may lose one arrow in five tens Not more'

'So thou thinkest by thy shooting to become a great chief!' jeered Bran.

'Not by shooting only. I know another thing.' Arril nodded mysteriously

'Tell me!' Bran begged; but Arril only laughed and tossed his black head, and Bran could get no more out of him

Arril finished his bow, and kept it carefully hidden in a hole under some rocks He made a case for it out of the skins of rabbits, but only waited his opportunity to bring down some larger game with which to make a really satisfactory cover to keep out the damp He used to disappear all day, not even telling Bran where he went, and coming back in the evening refused to give any account of himself.

Bran was very anxious about his friend in these days The boy was always shirking his work, idling and lazing over it even when he condescended to do anything, and was besides becoming a perfect imp of mischief He was cheeky to everybody, played practical jokes on the women, and even put a hedgehog into Moran's bed. He did get a rating over this last, to be sure, but not nearly so severe a one as was to be expected. He was perfectly right when he said that Amballo loved him The old Headman treated him like a son, and the little wretch presumed on it

For all his wickedness, however, Arril was very lovable Even those who scowled at his impudence were often forced to follow up the frown by a smile

at his fun. There were two, however, whom he never won over. One of these was Garm, the slave whom Moran had bought, who had tormented Arril about the pork, and the other was Moran himself.

Arril quite realized that Garm hated him, and I fear he got quite a lot of enjoyment from it. He knew that Garm dared not do him any harm for fear of the wrath of Amballo, and the small boy found a thousand ways of worrying the big one. Garm would have just fetched up a skinful of water and filled all the water-pots, when, the moment his back was turned, several would be upset. He would be sent to cut firewood, and have to hunt all over the village for his axe. Bits of stone and bitter leaves got mysteriously mixed up in his food; and his sandals were as often as not full of thorns. So it was no wonder that he could not bear Arril.

But why Moran should hate his friend, Bran could not think. He asked him about it one day.

'What hast thou done to Moran, thou featherpate? *He*'s no one to play tricks on.'

'I? I've done naught to him—saving only that hedge-pig in his bed. But he's forgotten that.'

'Not he. But before that he hated thee. I say, what hast thou done?'

'Oh, dead rabbits! He hates me not. He does not heed me.'

'Hast thou not marked how his eyes follow thee, he scowling the while under his brows?'

'Oh, thou art afraid for thy life if one so much as look at thee. Thou hast not a word for any one save "Yes, master!" and "No, master!" Now I—I am a chief's son, and I fear no one—and no one hates me, saving only Garm, and him I can deal with.'

Bran was too worried even to laugh at Arril's swagger. He was quite sure that he was right, and that Moran meant to do Arril a mischief. He wished he could get Arril to see that.

However, Garm had his innings first.

After the turn of the year, when the days began to grow a little longer, the weather grew much more severe. Snow fell thickly on the heights, and a frost followed. The Moor Folk were comfortable enough, for they had stores of grain, dried fish, and meat laid up, and were able to kill a goat or a sheep if necessary. But the wild animals fled into cover, and those that preyed on others went hungry and sought for new prey.

Ordinarily the wolves kept to the forest, and were only dangerous by night. But now when dark came on, the villagers heard weird wailings from beyond the walls, and every morning in the snow appeared the tracks of many pads. Each evening the flocks were driven within the walls for safety, and now in the worst of the weather remained there all day, for they could not graze while the snow covered the ground. The wolves smelled them, and grew bolder. One night a great commotion, bleating of sheep and goats and barking of dogs, brought out all the villagers with torches. They could not find anything—but when the sheep were counted, two were missing.

Now the village wall was high and wide. It seemed impossible that a wolf could overleap it. Going round the village in the morning to look for signs, the men found tracks much larger than any they had seen before, tracks which must belong to a giant wolf, doubtless the leader of the pack, and

so much larger and stronger that he could easily jump a wall that would baffle an ordinary beast.

Cunning, too. The men lay in wait by night, spears ready, by the part of the wall where the brute had entered before, and never heard a thing but a slight scuffle, that might have been goats pushing for the warmest place, on the other side of the village. But next day there was blood on the snow, and another sheep missing.

Then they built the wall up higher. The sheep were safe after that, but a boy going down to the stream for water in broad daylight did not come back.

After that, bands of five or six went to fetch water, and the men organized a wolf-hunt. They came back empty-handed, however, with scared faces, reporting that the wolves were surely devil-wolves. They had caught glimpses of them repeatedly, but though they sent arrow after arrow, no wolf was hit, and every arrow they sent was lost.

Arril sniggered a little at this.

'Maybe it was your bad shooting, and no magic,' he suggested cheekily. 'Except, indeed, that I marvel how ye can shoot so badly, except ye be bewitched always.'

'Thou art a wolf-cub thyself,' said Garm, snarling, and several people turned and looked at Arril in a scared way.

'Who knows?' said Goltar, the chief hunter. 'He comes from none knows where, and is a most ill-spoken brat.'

'He set all the slaves by the ears the night he was landed,' added Moran, 'and he hath very strange ways. Why, think ye, goes he off alone so often?'

'Is it in truth a wolf that steals our sheep?' suggested someone in a voice sharp with fear And then another put into words the horror that had lain unuttered in their minds since Garm first spoke

'A skin-changer! A wolf-child!'

And every one drew away from Arril, and hands were laid on daggers in an ugly manner

'But that is nonsense!' declared Amballo, his hand on the boy's shoulder. ''Tis an imp, I grant ye, and a mannerless brat.' He shook Arril gently. 'But there 's no magic in him See now, mind thy tongue, or it will get thee into trouble,' he added rather sternly to the boy

Arril was rather scared.

'I 'm no skin-changer nor wolf-child,' he cried in a high, quavering voice. 'I 'll prove to ye I 'm not. I 'll show ye what I 've been about Wait and ye shall see '

He darted from Amballo's clutch, through the village and out at the opening The heavy wooden fencing that barred the way had been pushed aside to let the hunters in Up the hillside he ran, to the niche in a pile of rocks where he had hidden his precious bow He was not very clear what he meant to do with it

He had just pulled aside the stones and drawn out the case when a shout from the village made him look up. Right—left—oh, terror! Ears raised, nose wrinkled, not one hundred and fifty yards away, rose the great grey head of a wolf from behind a rock!

Arril gave a desperate glance back at the village. If he raced there as fast as his legs would carry him, surely the beast would not dare to follow him up to

the very walls in broad daylight! And the folk would come to his rescue, drive off the beast with shouts and arrows He would throw a stone to scare it and then dash

But in the village there was panic, and Garm saw his opportunity

'The devil-wolf! The devil-wolf!' he cried, and beckoning to the young men to help him, began to push the barrier into place Every one was too scared to think They only wanted to have a secure fence between them and the awful creature, who they were sure was more than an ordinary wolf They shoved with a will, and in a moment Arril's retreat was cut off

The wolf stared at Arril, who strove desperately to loose his bow from its casing He dared not take his eyes off the green glowing ones that fixed him, lest the wolf should spring It was coming nearer, slinking stealthily from rock to rock Now it crouched There! the bow was free at last

Arril felt for the thong, bent and strung the bow, and drew out an arrow Luckily it was one with a flint tip Even as he did so, the huge brute launched itself

The villagers crowding to the walls saw the bow snap into position and bend back from the boy's outstretched arm The cord twanged It was all done so quickly that it seemed impossible that he could have taken aim; the wolf was five yards away from him, enormous, wide-mouthed, terrible. But clean into the gaping jaws the shaft sped, straight and true, and with a cough the creature fell, rolled over and over down the slope, kicked a little, and lay still, the blood pouring from its throat

Even as his arrow left the bow, Arril tumbled backwards and lay limp and white The terror and strain had been altogether too much for him

'Thou hast killed him!' Bran screamed at Garm, and whipping the knife from his belt drove it into the slave's side Then, with the agility he had learned in many a scramble up the cliffs of his home, he was up and over the wall, and running to where his friend lay unconscious

'Thou little fool, there may be others!' Amballo shouted 'Push aside the fence! You fools, open the way, bring spears, bows, anything! What ailed ye, to close the gate like cowards and leave a child outside?'

The villagers, as though released from a spell, pulled aside the barrier and crowded out No one had any time to attend to Garm, who had fallen moaning to the ground As the mob surged out he was roughly thrust to one side Bran had already reached Arril, was kneeling by him, lifting up the dark head and feeling if the heart still beat

'He lives!' he gasped, as Amballo came up

'Of course he lives,' said the Headman gruffly 'He hath but fainted with the fear And no wonder! But what a shot that was! He hath slain the devil-wolf, and saved the village this day Slave I will not call him any longer, but son! Bear witness to this, all ye who hear'

Arril opened his eyes and grinned faintly

'Vile archers, every one of 'em,' he said weakly. '*I 've* shown 'em how to shoot'

Then Amballo picked him up and set him on his shoulder, and he was borne into the village in triumph, his long black hair floating wildly

Bran followed the procession a little sadly Arril was free now, and he was still a slave Must he lose his friend? He had better have been considering that, friend or no friend, he had made an enemy, for Garm in the shadow of the wall, twisting a strip of his shirt tightly about his ribs to staunch the blood that flowed from the knife-wound, sent after him a look of hatred that might have made him think, if he had seen it

But Bran, thinking only of Arril, did not see

CHAPTER VII

BRAN TAKES A FLOGGING

So the winter passed, and the spring came, and after that the summer brought out the heather in purple glory on the moors But Bran was not at all happy.

For one thing, he saw very little of Arril now that his friend was free. He came very rarely to the forge in the woods, but went off on long expeditions of his own, carrying his famous bow Sometimes he would be away for days at a time Being now recognized as the adopted son of the Headman, he refused absolutely to do any work such as carrying wood or fetching water, and he made it quite plain to Amballo that he was not in the least interested in bronze-working But his skill with the bow was so great that it seemed only natural for him to spend most of his time hunting

Also, as he had hinted to Bran months ago, he had some other game afoot, but what that was he told nobody Only he would turn up after days of absence with a merry, mysterious look, and not nearly enough of a bag to account for the time he had been away

Another trouble of Bran's was the fact that, for all the months he had worked in the smithy, Amballo gave him no chance of trying his own hand at the forging To blow all day at the fire, or weary his back bringing up logs, became very dull after a while He wanted to make things It was most annoying to know that his master was prepared to

teach Arril the moment he showed any signs of wishing to learn; while as for Bran, who would have given his ears to try, he was only treated as a slave. So Bran was lonely and depressed.

About a week before midsummer all the village was in a clatter. The wagons were brought out, the oxen hitched up. Amballo and the chief men of the village put on their best attire—kilts of fine wool belted with broad belts of leather, cloaks of scarlet and blue and purple, armlets of bronze or gold, twisted ribbons of bronze called torques about their necks. They took with them a goodly number of axes, spearheads, knives, and daggers, together with some short swords—most difficult things to cast—and ingots of tin and copper. Many of the women and older children made ready too.

For the great Festival of Midsummer was approaching. At this time all the tribes of the west country met together at the Great Stone Temple, to make sacrifice to the Sun-God in his splendour.

The procession rolled down the hillside at dawn one morning, two wagons full of women and children, with men, young women, and half-grown boys marching in their bravery before the oxen, whips cracking, cloaks fluttering, and everybody shouting and waving good-byes to those that were left. And with them went Arril.

There were only old men and women, nursing mothers, very little children, and slaves left behind. Bran stood watching them off with a very left-out-of-it feeling, and as soon as they were out of sight ran down the hillside to the deserted forge. They would be away for many days, he knew, and he had it in mind to comfort himself by making an experi-

ment which he would have no chance of trying while there were people about

Ingots of copper and tin were piled in a corner of the workshop, and Bran, looking guiltily over his shoulder, gathered up one or two and put them into a bag which he had brought for the purpose He took a mould, also, choosing one for a knife as being the easiest A spearhead would have to have a core of clay put in to make it hollow, and was an awkward thing to tackle A crucible for melting, hammer, and chisel he gathered up, and then out of the smithy he darted with his booty It would not do to make a fire there, or someone would notice Bran knew quite well that he was doing a forbidden thing If Amballo ever got to know——!

He crossed the stream at the place where stones had been thrown in to make stepping-stones, and plunged more deeply into the forest He knew the place to which he was going—a heap of rocks standing up among the trees, tumbled one upon the other and forming a kind of shelter A good spot in which to hide and work

He soon had a small fire going, and the ingots melting in the crucible He knew the proportion well by this time—one of tin to nine of copper Soon he had forgotten his loneliness in the excitement of work Stirring, testing, pouring into the moulds, keeping the fire up—he had, of course, no one to blow for him—the time passed so quickly that he was immensely surprised to notice that by the sun it was late afternoon He had bungled his first two or three pourings, but by this time he was so far successful as to feel satisfied to leave one to cool It was time to get back, or he would be missed.

He covered his treasures with stones and leaves and started back. It was quite safe to leave them there, as no one of those left in the village ever went so far into the woods.

'And where hast *thou* been?' a rough voice demanded as Bran sprang up the hill towards the village It was Garm—Garm who always walked a little on one side now, because the wound Bran had given him had shrunk the muscles in healing

'About my own business,' Bran answered tartly He did not see that he need give an account of himself to Garm

'Why wast thou not here to help me fetch wood?' the older boy went on, blocking the path Bran being smaller, and lower down the hill beside, was at a disadvantage.

'Thou art not my master,' he answered boldly, feeling all the same that if Garm chose to give him a push he might easily get a broken leg, and no one could say how it happened.

'Am I not?' Garm grinned maliciously 'Old Amballo 's away, and Moran too, and *I 'm* master of the slaves, I 'll tell thee! Thou shalt have a good beating.'

Bran glanced about him There were rocks on either side the path, and plenty of loose stones for Garm to throw if his victim should try to escape Things looked nasty, but Bran had been in awkward corners before now. Garm had no time to realize what was happening as the smaller boy leaped forward to meet him, stooped and caught him round the legs with a suddenness that upset his balance Bran was a sturdy youngster, and Garm was taken unawares Over Bran's head he shot,

face downward on the rocky path, and rolled head over heels.

'I am master this time, Garm,' Bran called mockingly, as he ran toward the village.

Garm rose slowly. His nose was bleeding, his face was scratched and bruised, and he had torn the skin off his hands in trying to save his head. He looked very evil.

'But I'll pay thee one day, thou red-head!' he muttered to himself.

Bran took no heed of him. During the following days he was thoroughly happy, and forgot all about missing Arril, or Amballo's coldness, or Garm's enmity. Day after day he ran down to his hiding-place, melted and poured and hammered and chiselled to his heart's content. He achieved a quite creditable knife, after several failures through not mixing the tin and copper properly, and after this he ventured on a bolder attempt. He returned the knife mould to the workshop, and took a block for a palstave instead. This meant hollow casting for the socket, and the making of a little loop to pass a thong through, and needed very great care. He made many mistakes, such as putting in the clay while the metal was too hot, then when it was too cold, not filling all the mould truly, making one side too thin, and so on. But in the end he made something passable, and a few days before the party returned he had the joy of cutting a haft with a knife of his own making, and fitting it to his own palstave.

After this he did not try any more bronze-working. He carefully returned all the tools to the smithy, and hoped that Amballo would not notice that some of the

ingots were gone The knife and palstave he hid away—he would only be able to use them on the sly But his breast swelled with pride that he had succeeded in making them Perhaps, some day, he would show them to Amballo, and Amballo would be so amazed at his skill that he would greet him as a brother craftsman, and would teach him all his secrets, and Bran would become a great bronze-smith, as great as Amballo himself!

So he dreamed his day-dreams, not guessing what lay before him, and whose envious mind had planned a revenge for that knife-wound and that fall

On a wet and windy afternoon the party from the Great Stone Temple came back They were all rather disgruntled because of the rain, the women were cross and chilly and the children fretful Bran ran up to Arril to ask him how he did, but Arril only shrugged his shoulders

''Twas well enough. I'm cold and hungry,' he snapped, and followed Amballo into the hut

Bran retired to the shelter of the ruined dwelling and sat down, his arms about his knees Really, life was abominable Arril was getting far away from him, he would not be able to work at the bronze for a long time to come, and the rain had found a hole in the broken roof and was dripping down his neck Also, he was hungry, and every one was too busy to give him anything to eat

From the huts, where the travellers were having supper, he caught whiffs of savoury smells Perhaps, when they were all well fed, he could venture to go to Amballo's hut and get some food Amballo was always generous, if cold Garm had gone in with Moran his master There really was no reason, Bran

reflected presently, why he should stay outside and shiver He got up

There was a cheerful glowing fire on the Headman's hearth Amballo was seated on a bench with a bowl between his knees, and at his feet on a skin crouched Arril, gnawing a bone Hoa, Amballo's widowed sister, who kept house for him, sat in a corner spinning The place looked warm and comfortable

Arril saw Bran first as he stood hesitating in the doorway, and grinned a welcome

'Here 's Bran,' he announced 'Bran, old lad, where hast been?'

Amballo turned round and smiled also Plainly warmth and food had restored the good temper of both of them

'Come and eat, boy,' he said kindly 'Why—art all wet! What foolishness is this, to stay out in the rain?'

'I did not know if ye wanted me.' Bran came forward with a warm feeling at his heart, and settled down on the skin by Arril Amballo pushed the big cooking-pot nearer to him, and Arril passed him the flesh-hook Bran fished about in the pot and drew out a lump of meat, which he began to chew contentedly All was well again, and Arril had come back

He wanted to ask his friend about his journey, but did not like to speak in the presence of Amballo, and Arril did not start the subject Never mind, plenty of time for questions when they were alone

'And how hast thou fared while we were away?' Amballo inquired presently

Bran flushed, for he had no intention of telling his master what he had been up to

'All well,' he answered 'One of the goats fell and broke its leg, but Gano set it, and it walks with a limp'

'And thou thyself has been as lazy as an ox in pasture,' Amballo teased him good-naturedly 'Wert glad to be quit of work, I 'll warrant, while thy master was away.'

Bran laughed uneasily, and then started violently as a voice came harshly from the doorway

'Ay, while his master was away! Ask him again, Amballo, ask him again. Truly he has not been idle.'

'What is this, Moran?' said Amballo severely, turning half round 'Since when has it been the custom to thrust into a man's dwelling without first calling?'

'Thy pardon, Amballo,' apologized Moran hastily, coming into the hut. 'But when thou hast learned that which I came to tell, thou wilt understand that I forgot all things else'

'What is it?' asked Amballo gravely

'That slave of thine'—Moran pointed to Bran, who stood up trembling—'hath eyes, it seems, that spy, and hands that can fashion what his eyes have seen Or didst thou, perchance, O Chief of Smiths! grant leave that an Outlander, a slave, and moreover a boy not come to manhood, should meddle with thy holy craft?'

'Explain!' Amballo's tone was deadly cold.

Bran looked at the door, thinking of escape, but Moran stood in the way Arril sat still as stone, staring.

'Daily in thy absence,' Moran went on, 'did this Bran go down to thy forge, take thy tools and thy ingots, and go off to a lair of his in the forest. There

hath he dared to set his impious hand to the shaping of metal, the craft that is sacred to our people for ever, since Diwa the God-Smith first taught thy grandsire's grandsire's grandsire.'

'How knowest thou this?' Amballo set his bowl on the floor and rose. He was very pale and his brows were a black line above his eyes

'Garm, my slave, hath followed him daily He can show the place where this was done, and he hath the things that were wrought'

Suddenly Bran ceased to tremble His face, which had gone white, flushed hotly and his eyes blazed So it was Garm who had done this! Now he understood He was not afraid any more, but very angry

'Hoa, fetch me the whip,' said Amballo The old woman placed in his hands the many-thonged, knotted scourge with which the Headman was wont to mete out punishment To do him justice, he used it very seldom.

'It is not just!' suddenly broke out Arril, springing to his feet and running to catch at Amballo's arm 'It is not just! Did I get stripes when I stole the stave for my bow, ay, and my arrow-heads from Goltar? What harm hath Bran done more than I? Why should he not work the bronze—and indeed it is very clever of him!'

He stopped, all out of breath

'Arril, my son, thou speakest of that which thou dost not understand' Amballo's voice softened

'Bran hath worked harder than I for thee! And me thou hast been kind to Dost not mind when he would toil all day at the bellows, and I—I ran away and played? It is me that thou shouldest beat!'

'Do not bandy words with me, or may be I *will*

beat thee,' said Amballo grimly 'It is because he hath worked well that I do not turn him forth for the wolves to eat—and also because he doth not know what he hath done But, by Diwa the God-Smith, he shall understand!'

The thongs whistled through the air and fell upon Bran's naked back The boy winced and gasped, but turned his head towards Arril with a proud little smile

'I am used to beatings,' he said 'It was good of thee to plead for me, Arril'

As the lash fell again and again, tearing the skin until the blood ran down, it was Arril who first moaned and then burst into stormy crying Bran stood with his shoulders hunched and head bowed, clenching his teeth He saw Moran standing with arms folded, satisfaction in his eyes, and behind him, peering through the curtain, the leering, triumphant face of Garm He would not let them hear him cry

Then the hut seemed to grow dark, and to tip up all about him, and without a sound he fell forward on his face

CHAPTER VIII

ARRIL'S SECRET

HE woke to an almost unbearable pain, and in spite of himself gave a little wail of agony Someone was touching his torn back, and it was more than he could stand

'Oh, Bran dear, I cannot help hurting thee!' came Arril's voice 'But truly thy cuts will be better when I have bathed them And Hoa hath given me some soothing leaves to lay on'

Bran found that he was lying on his side in a corner of the hut, his head on a roll of furs Arril was bathing his back with warm water

'I am sorry that I cried out,' he whispered, and fainted again

When he opened his eyes once more the pain was easier Strips of linen were bound round him, and Arril was sitting by his side waving flies away.

'Oh, my Bran, how he hath hurt thee!' Arril broke out, with tears in his voice

'It is nothing,' said Bran 'Rauc hath often beaten me worse than that' This was not true, but he wanted to comfort his friend 'And I do not mind at all now thou art good to me,' he went on 'I feared thou hadst grown too great a man to care for me any more'

'Why shouldest thou think that?' Arril's eyes grew round with surprise

'For many moons I have scarcely seen thee Thou wouldst be off and away, and tell me nothing

And then, when thou camest home, thou wouldst not speak to me '

'I am very sorry,' said Arril penitently 'I was cold and wet—and oh, Bran, the Feast of the Great Stone Temple made me ache for home!'

'What is it like?' Bran asked with interest

'It is a great grey ring of stones—great—great—greater than the whole village, I think! And a priest in a black robe slew a man on the altar at the rising of the sun. I did not like that But it was the horses, Bran, the horses! Though they do not know how to ride upon their backs, as we do, but harness them to chariots so that they cannot show their swiftness to the full Yet the chariots are very beautiful! And there came great chiefs, with gold on their arms and necks, splendid to look at. Some of them had yellow hair, such as I have never seen Lighter than thine, Bran And they raced their chariots one against the other Bran, there was a boy there but little older than I, and he had a chariot of his own and two red horses They told me he was Prince Madoc, son of King Evarwc, who is the greatest of chiefs He bore away the prize for shooting from his chariot while his charioteer drove at full speed That was good shooting, though not after the fashion of my folks '

'Didst thou shoot?' Bran was beginning to forget his pain in his eagerness to hear of the wonders

'Nay—Amballo said I was too young. But one day I will go, and I will show them what shooting is! And I will get Amballo to take thee also.'

Bran shook his head mournfully

'Amballo will never trust me again,' he said. 'I have made him very angry '

'Well,' said Arril, his narrow eyes gleaming, 'I can

tell thee how to punish Amballo, and to win favour with Moran. And Moran will be chief when Amballo dies.'

'What dost thou mean? Moran hates both thee and me.'

'Me he only hates because of Amballo. He is very jealous because the Headman is a better craftsman than he. Moran doth not know the charms that Amballo sings over his work.'

'That is true,' Bran agreed. 'Amballo always stops singing if Moran comes to the forge.'

'It is these charms that make his work so good.' Arril was quite sure of this. 'Now, Moran would do anything for one who would teach him the charms. One of his men told another, and I heard.'

'Well, but what has that to do with me?' asked Bran.

'Thou couldst hearken and learn the charms! Amballo payeth no heed to thee when he worketh.'

'I do not know whether he will have me in the smithy ever again,' said Bran gloomily. 'I shall be set to getting firewood and herding goats all day.'

'I should think that would be better than to toil in the heat until thine arms and back are like to break,' said Arril. 'But every man to his taste, and thine is a very strange liking for hard work. Now I think Amballo will take thee back, for he doth not trust many. He thinks he hath taught thee a lesson.'

'That he hath,' groaned Bran.

'Well, well, thou canst have thy revenge on him.'

'I do not want to,' Bran said. 'I deserved a beating for taking what was not mine.'

Arril only laughed. It was plain that he did not see it in that light.

'Now I have something else to tell thee,' he said, leaning over and speaking softly. 'I 'll tell thee why I was away so often in the spring-time. Or—— No! I 'll not tell thee. I 'll show thee. To-morrow, if thou art well enough.'

'I 'm well enough now,' declared Bran, and tried to sit up. The pain nearly made him faint again.

'Oh, thou foolish one,' said Arril gently, 'thou art very brave, but it is better to lie still for a little.'

'It would be better,' Bran agreed. 'But I shall be well to-morrow. I do not know why I am so sick now—I was not wont to take heed of a beating.'

'Thy back is torn to rags,' Arril told him. 'Why didst thou not cry out? I think Amballo would have forgiven thee if thou hadst not been so proud.'

Bran did not answer. He was feeling numb and drowsy, and either the pain was lessening or he was getting used to it. Presently he drifted off to sleep.

He woke many times during the night, when forgetting his hurts he tried to turn over. But when the early summer dawn stole in round the edges of the skin over the doorway, he sank into a healing dreamless sleep that did not break until midday.

Amballo was standing over him when he woke, and the old man's face was grave but not unkind.

'How is it?' Amballo asked.

'Well,' Bran answered bravely. 'I—I ask pardon.'

Amballo's lips curled into a smile, but as though against his will.

'Why didst thou not say as much last night? Maybe I should not have whipped thee so hard.'

'I do not mind being whipped,' persisted Bran.

'Hm. In any case, I am sorry that I hurt thee so much.' Amballo paused. 'And now, wilt thou give

me thy promise that thou wilt not touch the bronze again?'

Bran choked This was a great deal too final But there was no help for it

'I promise,' he said

'Swear then by thy gods'

'I swear by Sea-Mother! I will not touch the bronze again—unless—unless thou givest me leave'

Again Amballo smiled, this time grimly

'Oh ay, if thou waitest for my leave, thou wilt wait long enough So I will let thee come and work in the smithy'

'Oh!' was all Bran could say, his face one beam of delight, and he pulled himself up with some difficulty, seized his master's hand and kissed it

'Ait mighty grateful for hard work,' said Amballo

Bran was stiff and sore for a day or two, but was too hardy not quickly to get over the effects of his beating Amballo excused him from work longer than was absolutely necessary, perhaps to mark his sorrow for having hit so hard On the third day Arril came up to his friend with dancing eyes

'Come, if thou canst walk up the moor, I will show thee what I spoke of!' he said

He led Bran up the hillside, through the heather, down a stream-bed until they came to a little pool Here he stood still and whistled three times

Presently there came the sound of galloping hoofs, and over the hilltop, manes and tails flying, came a troop of the little shaggy moorland ponies that wandered wild On the crest of the hill they stopped, stamping, heads tossing, tails switching Arril whistled again

Bran stood amazed He had more than once

caught glimpses of these shy swift creatures, but had thought of them as wild beasts, wild as the wolf or the deer, not to be tamed or approached. But now as he watched, one of them detached itself from the group and stepped daintily down-hill

Often stopping to shake its head as though mistrustful of the two boys by the stream, it came towards them Arril spoke soft words in a tongue unknown to Bran, his hand outstretched The pretty creature whinnied and arched its neck, then, catching a strange scent mingled with the one it had learned to know, threw up its head and veered away, its eye sidling back uneasily. Still the smooth coaxing words flowed from Arril's lips

Then on a sudden he gave a little run and leaped. The horse swerved and plunged, but the boy was seated firmly on its back, gripping with his knees, his hand was on its mane and his voice in its ear In a moment or two the kicking ceased, and the pony stood still, owning its master

Arril threw Bran a glance of triumph, nudged with his small bare heel at the shaggy flank, and his mount wheeled about and cantered up the slope towards the others. Bran expected them to disappear on the other side of the hill, but as they reached the top they swung round and trotted along the ridge, the riderless ponies against the one half-tamed Away they went, growing smaller in a few minutes He saw them descend into the valley, turn again, and come thundering up the stream's bed at full speed

To Bran's horror, as they came up he saw that the little horse Arril had ridden was bare-backed. His reckless friend had dared too far, then, and somewhere among the heather and grey rocks lay with a

broken limb—or even a broken neck! And this wild herd was coming down on him as he stood there in frozen helplessness. In another minute he would be trampled to death, and there would be no one to go and help Arril.

Then he saw that most of the horses had veered and were climbing the hillside behind him. Only one came on, and as it came it laughed! This crowning horror was too much for him. He shrieked and flung himself face downward in the heather. The laughter rang out louder than before.

'Why, Bran, Bran, thou fool!'

It was Arril's voice, surely! Bran looked up, trembling. There was the pony, poised as if to dart away at any minute, and on its back, his long black hair loose and flying out wildly, Arril himself.

'I scared thee, did I? Thought'st I was lying dead among the heather? Not Arril son of Iolo son of Panna! Look, thus it is done.'

He threw himself back along the pony's spine, holding on by its tail and letting himself swing so that only his foot showed hooked over its shoulder. Bran saw that from a distance it would seem exactly as though the pony were riderless. Then Arril sprang up with a whoop, leapt to his feet on the horse's back, and while it shied and pranced swayed easily as though his feet were glued to it—no, not quite, for Bran noticed that he gave little light jumps that kept him in place whatever the creature might do.

Then in one bound he was off; standing with his arm round his pet's neck, caressing it and talking to it.

'Go now, my Dawn-wind, my beloved, my heart

of fire!' he said at last, giving it a gentle slap As the pony cantered off, he turned to Bran for praise.

'What say you to that?' he demanded

'Had I not seen with my own eyes I would not have believed,' gasped Bran 'Even now I 'm not sure I 'm not dreaming! And didst thou tame that wild thing thyself, and mount and ride him?'

'That did I! And now tell me, dost thou think that there is any in this Misty Isle that could do as I have done?'

'I do not know,' said cautious Bran

'But I do! I have seen them, and I tell thee, they dare not ride upon their horses' backs They harness them to their lumbering chariots, and they guide them with whip and rein Call you *that* horsemanship? But as for me, with naught but my bare hands and my knees did I tame Dawn-wind Ay, my father used to say that I rode not badly And that, Bran, was praise from one of *my* folks!'

'Truly I think thou wert right, Arril,' said Bran reverently, 'when thou saidst that thou wouldst become a great chief. But why hast thou hidden all this from Amballo and the others?'

'Because I choose,' replied Arril carelessly 'I like to think that I have a surprise for them One day, maybe, 'twill be useful to give them a fright Ay!' he burst into merry laughter, 'I will ride round the village standing on my hands! I will shoot arrows round their heads! I will set the goats a-bleating and the dogs a-barking, I will make the women and children scream and chatter, and the men shout with terror! But oh, my Bran!' his voice changed, '*they* do not know what is good riding Now, had my

father been here, I think even he would have said. "Well done!"'

He threw his arm over Bran's shoulder, and when his friend, unable to control himself, winced away, Arril exclaimed with concern

'Oh, I am sorry! I had forgotten that thy back is still sore And, look 'ee, Bran, I 've told Moran '

'Told him what?' asked Bran 'Nay, my back 's all right Put back thine arm, Arril, I 'd rather have it there, and a little pain '

'Why, I told him——' Arril put his arm carefully about Bran's neck 'I told him that if he wanted the secret of Amballo's charms to ask thee Then thou wilt tell him, and he will be pleased with thee, and maybe buy thee of Amballo And, as for the old man, he 'll not be Master Smith any more '

'Arril, thou art the strangest fellow that ever I saw!' exclaimed Bran 'Dost thou not love Amballo, who hath made thee his son, and borne with thy whimsies, and ever been so good to thee?'

'Did I ask him?' Arril tossed his head petulantly 'I am not of his breed, though he do not eat pig A niggling craftsman he, and I am a chief's son!'

'And thou hast told Moran to ask me!' Bran went on 'Well, Arril, he may ask, but I would not tell him if I could '

'What!' Arril took his arm from Bran's neck 'Not have thy revenge for the stripes Amballo laid on thee? I 'd have had a knife in his side if he 'd so treated me I do not understand thee. I know thou'rt brave—I could not have stood that beating without crying out! And yet——'

'Amballo is a good old man, and withal a master craftsman, and I honour him Besides, Arril, didst

thou not promise to be faithful to him, that night when he spoke to thee in the wagon?'

'I do not remember what I said I was tired of his talk, and I was sleepy'

'Arril, thou art a traitor and a promise-breaker!' Bran clenched his fists

'Oho! That is what he calls me when I have done my best to help him! Bran, *thou* art an ungrateful hound!'

This was too much. Bran, forgetful of his sore back, flung himself upon Arril, and they struggled together like fierce young wolves. Bran was much heavier and stronger than Arril, but his bruises hampered him, and in a few minutes the lighter boy twisted free and was off like a hare At the top of the hill he turned

'Maybe thou hast bigger arms than mine,' he taunted, 'but thou canst not catch me! Chase the wind, old Slow-foot!'

That was quite true Bran was no swift runner, though he could go at his own pace for any length of time, and Arril seemed to have wings to his light feet Bran plodded up the hill feeling thoroughly miserable, for he had called Arril by unforgivable names, quarrelled hopelessly, and it seemed impossible that they could ever be friends again.

He ought to have made allowances, he told himself. Arril was not like other people. Quite true, he had behaved as Bran would never have thought it right to behave; but, for all that, he was Arril, Arril who had stood up for him against Amballo, and whom he loved Bran gave a great sob and sat down on the heather Life was all wrong again and he wished he were dead

Then a pair of arms came round his neck from behind and a nose was rubbed in his hair.

'Bran, thou silly old fool!'

'Oh, Arril, I am sorry I said what I did!'

'Heed it not. I must needs be friends with thee, slow old Bran; stupid, faithful old Bran.'

The two walked home with their arms round each other's necks.

Just before they reached the village they met Moran. He seemed to be on the look-out for them, for he came up the trail a little way and stood waiting.

'Hey, Bran!' he said, as soon as they were near enough to hear an ordinary speaking voice. 'How goes the sore back?'

'Well enough,' Bran answered, not too graciously, remembering Moran's pleased look while he was being beaten.

'That was too hard a whipping Amballo gave thee,' Moran went on, dropping his voice a little. 'Had I known he would be so harsh with thee I would not have told him.'

'It is no matter,' said Bran shortly.

'He is too brave,' put in Arril, 'to make a to-do about it. But he was cruelly hurt.'

'Ay, he hath a stout heart,' agreed Moran. 'And so thou didst wish, Bran, to try a little working of the bronze thyself?'

'I did wrong,' Bran said briefly.

'Nay, fear not! I am not going to punish thee again. I was surprised at the news, and maybe in my first anger I was unjust. Indeed, why shouldst thou not work the bronze? But with a master of the craft, lad, to teach thee, that all may be rightly done and Diwa not be offended.'

Bran said nothing

'Thou art still afraid to speak frankly of thy wish? See now, I will prove to thee that I am sorry I had thee flogged, and that I would make thee amends '

Still Bran was silent Moran went on: 'There be two things that make good craftsmanship First, the skill of hand and the knowledge of metals, that can be taught by a master And second, the singing of charms that bring luck to the thing that is shapen Now Amballo hath both these, for his fathers were the first shapers of bronze, and had their wisdom from Diwa himself Now I, Moran, have the skill of hand not less than Amballo, and maybe more But Amballo will not part with the charms to me. Now —thou seest that thy master will not let thee be a craftsman, but uses thee only as a slave Dost thou not grow weary of toiling at the bellows, Bran?'

'Very weary,' Bran admitted

'So But if I had the charms I would buy thee of Amballo, and I would teach thee the craft '

'But I do not know the charms,' said Bran

'Thou canst listen and learn Ay, even as thou didst watch and learn until thou hadst the beginnings of craftsmanship I have seen what thou hast made, and it is not so ill done Thou shalt be a master craftsman, Bran, when thou art grown—if thou wilt get the charms for me '

'They are strange words, and he says them very low,' Bran argued, but Moran swept aside his objections

'Oh, thou canst get them if thou wilt Bethink thee! Is it not better to come to me, to learn the craft thou lovest, and to become a master smith held

in great honour, than to be all thy life a slave at the forge fire?'

'Surely it is better,' agreed Bran. 'I thank thee, Master Moran, and I will do my best.'

'That is a good lad! And a clever lad, and one that will be a great man!' Moran patted Bran's shaggy head. 'And now, not a word to any one. And if I speak roughly to thee in the village, thou wilt understand that it is so that Amballo will not suspect?'

'Surely,' said Bran, and Moran turned and strode away.

'Well done, Bran!' cried Arril. 'Now thou wilt both have thy revenge and learn thy craft.'

Bran turned to him with a very queer look in his grey eyes.

'What, didst thou think I knew not what was in Moran's heart? To ruin Amballo he means certainly, but never would he teach me the bronze-craft until all the seas run dry! He would but use me for his own plans, Arril, and likely have my throat cut when he had finished with me.'

'Then—what wilt thou do?'

'I will keep him waiting long for the charms, saying I cannot get the words right.'

'There must be an end some day.'

'Ah, well, some day 's not this day. Many tides will have flowed up the coast, and maybe Amballo will find a way to rid him of Moran.'

CHAPTER IX

BRAN'S TESTING

BRAN did not tell Amballo of what had passed between him and Moran. He knew that his master did not trust him very fully, and feared to be turned out of the smithy if Amballo knew that he had been bribed to reveal his secrets. So he said nothing, and trusted to his wits to get him out of the pickle when the time came.

Meanwhile he did as he had said When, as the weeks went by, Moran tackled him on the subject of the charms, Bran would shake his tawny head stupidly and mutter that he could not remember them all—only a little bit, and that might work the wrong way if he said it.

So the summer passed, and autumn came, and frosts at night showed that winter was on the way And Moran's patience grew shorter and shorter

'Bran, Bran, why dost thou not tell Amballo and be done with it?' Arril said anxiously 'Moran will find a way to hurt thee, be sure.'

Bran frowned 'Amballo would not take my word,' he said 'Why should he? I am only a slave, and one whom he distrusts because I tried to work the bronze'

'Then tell Moran the charms! I am sure thou knowest them by now.'

'Yes, I do,' Bran confessed. 'I have tried not to listen, but having once thought of it, spite of myself they are fixed in my head, tune and all.'

'Well, why thou wilt not win favour with Moran by telling him is more than I can see,' Arril declared 'What dost thou owe to old Amballo, who bought thee like a calf? I say thou art a fool!'

They were nearly at their old quarrel again Arril simply could not understand Bran's loyalty, and Bran could not make out why Arril did not care for Amballo who had done so much for him

One misty morning in early December (Moon of Silence, the Moor Folk called it) Amballo sent Bran out to gather him a bundle of heather for his bed The old man was getting conscious of aching bones, and needed the springy stems to make him a restful couch

Bran went off into the mist, and in a little while was out of sight of the village He knew where the heather grew thick and deep on the further side of the hill, and made straight for the place He did not notice that as he left the village Garm rose up from beside the wall and crept crookedly along behind him, his bare feet making no noise on the track

Bran was some time choosing his heather, cutting the tough stalks, and binding them into a bundle bigger than himself As he worked he hummed under his breath, and the tune that he hummed was one of those that went with Amballo's chants over his work Bran did not realize what he was doing, any more than we do when we hum a tune that is running in our head By and by he broke out into the words also

Suddenly a hand was on his shoulder, and he was jerked up and round, to face Moran—a very angry Moran by the way his black brows scowled.

'Ah!' said Moran, 'thou wilt cheat me, eh?

Pretend thou dost not know Amballo's charms, and all the while thou sing'st them to thyself'

'I—I—I do not know the words,' Bran faltered, feeling very frightened He was all alone with Moran, and the time was come when he could not pretend any longer.

'Liar! I heard thee sing one charm right through —words and all, every word And now teach it me, or——' He did not need to add any more

'I—I may have been wrong,' said Bran, but he realized that he was neatly caught

'I 'll chance thy being wrong. Come now, I have been put off quite long enough I 'll have the charms now, or I 'll wring thy red head off'

Bran thought desperately If he were found dead on the moor, no one would care particularly Amballo might think that Garm had done it, and might have him whipped, but he certainly would never suspect Moran Even if he did, how would that help Bran? He did not want to be killed at all, and Moran's fingers felt very hard as they pressed on his neck Then an idea came suddenly into his head

'I 'll tell thee,' he said, forcing a smile 'I was afraid I did not quite know it, but perhaps I do So listen carefully'

He began to sing, using Amballo's tune and some of the words, but every now and then changing them into gibberish that sounded like but was not quite right Moran sat down on a rock and fixed him with his dark eyes

'Sing that again,' he commanded when Bran stopped, and, feeling very uncomfortable, the boy obeyed In the middle Moran checked him

'That was not what thou sang'st before,' he said

sternly Bran had forgotten one of his nonsense words and made up another, hoping Moran would not notice

'I—I was wrong the first time,' he faltered. 'This is the right word '

'See that thou dost not mistake again,' Moran answered, with such meaning that Bran's heart began to pound wildly 'Begin from the beginning '

Bran did so, but fear was making him tremble all over, and putting everything out of his head In a little while he forgot himself again, and gave a different version.

'What does this mean?' Moran demanded fiercely

'I said I did not know it,' Bran pleaded piteously 'And, Master Moran, thine eyes make me so afraid that I stumble '

'If thou wert telling the truth thou wouldst have no need to be afraid,' said Moran. 'But I think thou art as full of trickery as an ant-heap is full of ants I 'll give thee one more chance to tell me true Sing again!'

Bran, nearly frantic with anxiety, did sing. But of course he made a worse mess than ever He forgot which words he had changed, forgot how he had changed them, stammered, stumbled, and finally came to a full-stop as Moran rose up in a black rage, gripped his shoulder, and shook him until his head felt as if it would fall off

'Thou art cheating me, thou little liar!' he cried furiously 'Thou wouldst give me the wrong words, wouldst thou, and think to make a fool of me, and anger the gods, mayhap! Give me now the true charm, or by Diwa I 'll kill thee slowly here and now!'

'I do not know it!' Bran protested

'Thou dost know it, and thou shalt tell me I know now that thou hast been playing with me Else why didst thou change the words so many times?'

'Because I forgot.' Bran stuck to his story

'That is a lie!' Moran shook him again 'The truth, now, and at once!'

Bran did not answer He did not see that there was anything to say. Moran shifted his grip to the boy's throat, and began to press slowly and cruelly Bran's eyes felt as if they were bursting, and his heart pounded

'I will have the charm, spoken truly as Amballo says it,' Moran insisted, but Bran shut his lips tightly—only to open them the next minute in a gasp as the pressure increased All the same, let Moran do as he liked, he was not going to get that charm

It was a serious matter to both of them, remember According to their beliefs, Amballo would be ruined if any one should use his charms without his consent He would both lose his position as Headman of the Moor Folk and as chief of all bronze workers of the south, and Moran would step into his place.

'Now wilt thou tell?' Moran let go of Bran's throat for a minute, and boy gasped painfully, but shook his head

'Thou stubborn little fool! What dost thou think to gain by silence? Have I not offered thee freedom and craftsmanship?—and if thou wilt not, thou shalt have nothing but death!'

'I will not!' said Bran

Then the hard hands were at his throat again, pressing very slowly, so that he should feel the

utmost of pain and suffocation, but very surely A red mist was gathering over his eyes, his tongue was sticking out, and there was a roaring in his ears Moran's furious face was just a blur

Then the roaring and pounding increased suddenly to thunder, mingled with a tremendous clatter, and, to his dulling ears, a far-away shout. Moran's hands left his throat in an instant, and Bran fell in a heap on the ground, struggling in agony for breath Something huge and dark blotted out the sky above him, there was trampling and clattering and neighing all around him, and, as he looked up with clearing sight, Moran had disappeared

Bran was in the midst of a troop of moorland ponies, all very excited, but, with the curious instinct of horses, careful not to tread on a living body The boy was extremely scared, and expected every moment that a horny hoof would come crashing down upon him So he lay still where he had fallen, huddled up with an arm over his face, waiting for a death quite as unpleasant as that which Moran was going to deal him

'Bran, Bran! Oh, Bran, art thou dead? Hath he killed thee? By my father's bow, then I will kill him!'

It was Arril's voice And there was Arril himself, upside-down along a pony's flank, looking at him with frightened eyes and reaching down to see if he still breathed Bran laughed croakily

'No, I 'm not dead,' he contrived to whisper His throat hurt him horribly 'I thought I was, though '

'So did I I feared I had come too late I saw Garm come back off the moor and speak to Moran, and Moran go the way Garm came So I followed,

and I saw him talking to thee. But then I had to call up the horses, and it was hard to find them in the mist.'

'So it was thou that saved me! Did Moran see thee?'

'Not he!' Arril chuckled. 'I was hanging on to Dawn-wind's tail!'

'And where is he now? Did thy horses kill him?'

'Oh no, he ran away. I think he thought all the devils of the moor were coming down on him. I'd have gone after and had him trampled but that I feared so for thee. Bran, he hath hurt thee dreadfully! There are great marks on thy neck where he choked thee, and they are turning black!'

'Are they? That is good,' said Bran hoarsely. 'Now I shall have something to show to Amballo to prove my words.'

'So thou wilt tell him at last?'

'Ay, he'll believe me now. Before, why should he? I think I will go home.'

'Canst thou stand?'

Bran got to his feet with some difficulty, but he shook so with weakness that he had to sit down again.

'I'll have to carry thee home,' Arril declared.

Bran laughed, still chokily. 'Thou canst not lift me!' said he. 'I am bigger than thou.'

'Not so much!' said Arril hastily. 'But I meant not to carry thee in mine arms. My Dawn-wind shall take us both back to the village.'

'Ride on that!' exclaimed Bran, affrighted. 'Oh, Arril, I could not! I should die of fear!'

'I shall never understand thee!' said Arril impatiently. 'There thou wouldst let thyself be choked

to death for an old man who beat thee senseless—and thou tookest that beating without a cry—and fearest to sit the back of my Dawn-wind! I know thou art brave, else I should say thou wert the veriest coward Look, reach me thy hand, climb on that rock, and set thy foot on my foot'

Bran set his teeth determinedly, stood up on the rock Arril pointed out, and stretched his hand Arril took it firmly, and with a jump and a scramble Bran found himself astride the neck of Dawn-wind Arril put an arm about him and held him on, and Bran clutched hard at the pony's mane with both hands

'Oh, Bran!' cried Arril in fits of laughter, 'thou art the funniest thing I ever saw! Sit not so stiffly—look, grip with thy knees and let thy body sway Oh ho ho ho! I shall fall off myself with laughing.'

'Sway!' panted Bran, holding on very tight 'How can I—help swaying? Oh, how is it—thou wert sick in a boat? This—is ten times—worse?'

They were going at an easy trot, and Bran was bumping up and down in a way that jolted out of him the little breath there was He was still faint from Moran's squeezing, and had it not been for Arril's arm about him he would certainly have fallen off

As it was, when as they drew near to the village Arril checked Dawn-wind and slid off his back, opening his arms to help his friend down, Bran tumbled off with such suddenness that he knocked Arril flat and both boys rolled in the mud.

'Pah! Thou clumsy——' Arril was beginning, but when he saw how white the other's face was under its tan and freckles, he changed his tone.

'Thou poor old fellow! Thou art still half dead Come in and lie down by the fire Away, Dawnwind!'

The pony galloped away into the mist, and Arril, helping Bran to his feet, drew his friend's arm over his own shoulders and put his other arm round his waist In this way he supported him through the village gate and into Amballo's hut

'What, Arril! Bran!' Amballo rose to his feet as they entered 'What hath happened?'

'Moran tried to kill him!' Arril declared, helping Bran to sink down on a rug by the fire, 'because he would not tell thy charms'

'Tell my charms!' Amballo's brows made that black sinister bar 'What knows he of my charms?'

'Having ears, can he help but hear?' said Arril boldly 'At any rate, Moran hath promised him freedom and craftsmanship for the telling of them He was choking the life out of him when I came up, because he would not tell Look at the marks on his throat!'

Amballo dropped on one knee, turned up Bran's chin—the boy winced at the touch on his bruised flesh—and examined the marks.

'Certainly a man's fingers have done this,' the Headman said. 'And because thou wouldst not tell my charms, eh?'

'It is so,' Bran agreed 'These many moons hath he been pestering me for them—but I put him off.'

'I was with him when Moran first asked him,' Arril confirmed

'And dost thou know them?' inquired Amballo

Bran wondered what would be the result if he told the truth, but decided that he had better do so.

'Yes,' he answered

'And why didst thou not tell them to Moran?'

'Thou art my master,' was all Bran could find to say.

'Ha And why didst thou not come to me with the tale—how long ago?'

'Seven moons,' put in Arril 'It was while his shoulders were still sore from thy beating, Father Amballo, that Moran first asked him '

Amballo shot a glance at his adopted son, then looked thoughtfully at Bran and repeated his question

'But why didst thou not tell me?'

'Why shouldst thou have believed me?' asked Bran

'Indeed and truly I might not have done so And I might have thought it well to turn thee from the forge, if I had believed, lest thou be tempted overmuch '

'So I thought,' said Bran honestly

'Thou hadst been promised freedom and craftsmanship for thy telling, and thou hast kept thy mouth shut '

'I did not believe in Moran's promises I think he would have strangled me just the same '

Amballo suddenly threw back his head and laughed

'Thou hast a shrewd head,' he said, chuckling. 'Well, thou hast proved thyself faithful Freedom thou wast promised, and freedom thou shalt have But craftsmanship—that is another matter Look thee, lad, there 's more in it than my teaching of thee There 's the favour of the gods—and will Diwa be angry if I give the secrets of my holy craft

to an Outlander? Also the village folk would be angry, and might bring trouble on us both'

'Yes,' agreed Bran, quite seeing the difficulties 'I would take my chance with the Moor Folk, but the gods are a different matter'

'So we will put aside the matter of the bronze craft,' Amballo went on 'But when we go down to the Great Stone Temple next year, thou shalt go with me, and we will inquire of the priest the will of the gods. However that may go, thou art not any longer a slave, Bran, but free Art content?'

'I am content,' said Bran, feeling that it was well worth an aching throat to have got thus far. And to himself he thought 'I have the charms and I have the knowledge All I lack is the skill, and that comes by practice Some day, whatever the priest says, I will be a worker of bronze'

CHAPTER X

THE FESTIVAL OF LO

In a way Bran's freedom did not make much difference to him He still gathered wood, fetched water, and worked at the bellows for Amballo in the smithy The Moor Folk treated him much as before, that is to say, they took very little notice of him. Garm kept out of the way as much as possible, and Moran never spoke to him at all Both of them, he knew, hated him with a deadly hatred and would have killed him if they safely could, but, now that Bran was free, to kill him would have meant death for Garm and a heavy fine for Moran

The real change in his position Bran felt in the way Amballo spoke to him The old man was sure now that he was faithful, he knew what he had suffered for his sake, and he respected him accordingly If he did not love him as he loved Arril—and it is a queer thing how love seems to arise for no particular reason—he leaned on him more Leaned on him actually, too, for as the winter grew colder Amballo suffered in all his old joints, and would press heavily on the boy's shoulder as they climbed the hill from the forge Bran did not mind, indeed he was proud of it. He was twelve years old now, square and knotty like a chunk of oak, and could work at the bellows all day without tiring

So winter again passed into spring, and spring to summer, and it was time to set out once more for the Midsummer Festival at the Great Stone Temple

Bran was to go with the others this time, and Amballo gave him a piece of new blue cloth to wear, and a bronze pin to fasten it on the shoulder He wore it wrapped about his body and held in place by a belt which he had made for himself, and the bronze pin pulled it up over one side of his chest, but left his right arm bare He had a pair of sandals, also, and felt very smart, but rather uncomfortable, as it was not his habit to wear any clothes at all at that time of year But one has to sacrifice ease for the sake of a good appearance!

Arril was very gay He wore a red woollen tunic, fastened like Bran's, and a brown cloak, his belt was studded with bosses of bronze, and a twisted ribbon of bronze (we call them torques) was about his neck It shone almost as brightly as gold Bran's clever fingers had wrought him a gay quiver for his arrows, his long black hair was confined by a bright band, and—crowning glory—Amballo had given him a thin gold armlet

Just as the party was about to start, Arril disappeared Amballo shouted his name, Bran fidgeted uneasily, the men stamped impatiently, and Moran muttered darkly into his beard

'I saw him a moment since,' exclaimed Amballo 'Where can the imp have got to? To delay us thus —I 'll whip him——'

'That thou wilt not, Amballo the Headman,' laughed one of his friends good-naturedly 'Thou 'lt never whip that darling of thine, though he stole all thy goods and——Diwa preserve us! What 's this?'

Everybody swung round at a clatter of hoofs, as Dawn-wind cantered up to the party, Arril standing triumphantly upon his back!

Amballo turned grey with anxiety. It must be remembered that he had no idea of what Arril had been doing this year, and thought that it was but a freak of the moment, and that his son would certainly be thrown off and killed. He was afraid to speak or stir, or do anything that might hasten the accident.

Moran, however, gave a wild and sudden shout. It might have been alarm, but Bran realized at once that it was intended to startle the pony and make him shy. Dawn-wind did shy, in fact. He reared up on his hind legs and swung about with a swiftness that made Amballo groan in agony and cover his face, only to be reassured in a moment by Arril's gay mocking laugh.

'Very well done,' jeered Arril, sitting astride now and soothing the frightened pony with knee and hand. '*Very* well done, Moran! Had been any other than I, Arril son of Iolo son of Panna, he would have been on the ground with his neck broken. But not I! I know my Dawn-wind too well. He hath frightened thee ere now, eh, Moran?'

'Thou——!' began Moran, turning purple with rage as he remembered the stampede of horses on the day he had had Bran in his power, and understood at last that it was Arril's work. Then he was silent, perhaps for lack of words, perhaps because he judged it wiser.

'Now, Amballo my father,' said the impudent boy, urging Dawn-wind close to the Headman, much to the latter's uneasiness, 'we will make them stare at the Great Stone Temple, will we not? Wilt thou ride with me?'

'My son,' said Amballo, trying to speak firmly,

'what foolishness is this? Come down off that wild beast, and——'

'Wild beast!' Arril pretended to be indignant Really he was enjoying the surprise he had prepared for so long 'My Dawn-wind a wild beast? Not he. He 'll knock thy cap off, my father, if I tell him to—or take thy belt in his teeth and lift thee off the ground—so—as we do to Moran——'

He wheeled the horse round, whispered in its ear, and in a moment the unhappy Moran found himself hanging in the air. Arril shouted with laughter, and there were many titters from the crowd

'Arril!' said Amballo sternly, though the corners of his mouth curled, 'thou delayest our starting. Come off'

'Nay,' Arril whispered again to Dawn-wind, who let down Moran, very dishevelled and alarmed 'I ride Dawn-wind to the Temple'

'Thou canst not!' Amballo was more worried than ever 'All men know that none can sit the back of a horse. They can be managed only in harness, fastened to the shaft of a chariot'

'All men here, maybe,' sniffed Arril 'Among *my* folk, men can ride I come on Dawn-wind, or I come not at all. I care not.'

Amballo of course gave way, and Arril headed the procession in great style His tricks kept them all in a state of horror to the end of the march, and Moran nearly swooned whenever he came near, expecting every minute to be treated in some undignified manner and made a laughing-stock before the party

Arril would come riding up at a great pace, make Dawn-wind shy, and pretend to fall off. The horse

would gallop on, apparently riderless, heading straight for the lines, and just as everybody scattered in terror, up would rise Arril from where he had been hanging and greet them with volleys of laughter Or he would insist on travelling upside down And once Dawn-wind carried him into camp apparently dead, and dropped him in a limp heap at Amballo's feet The poor old man, trembling with grief and fear, was stooping to turn over the crumpled body, when Arril seized his finger between his teeth and bit so sharply that Amballo gave a yelp of pain

He was really angry that time, and Arril realized that he had gone too far He was very subdued and apologetic, and made Dawn-wind beg pardon by rubbing his velvety nose against Amballo's shoulder.

They kept to the hills as far as possible (you may see the way they went on the map), and came on the seventh day into a broad and trampled road, and here they fell in with a great throng of people all going the same way There were folk on foot and folk in wagons and warriors in little wooden chariots banded with bronze. Each of these chariots was drawn by two horses fastened to a central shaft, and horses and men gleamed with gay ornaments. One and all turned in amazement to look at Arril riding proudly ahead of the Moor Folk and Arril himself became suddenly as haughty and dignified as a young prince The truth was, he was feeling all at once very shy, and did not want anybody to know it. He played no more monkey-tricks for the rest of the journey

They were on a great flat plain now, and all over the plain people were moving to one common centre

Arril, higher than the others on the back of Dawn-wind, gave a cry and pointed Bran, who was trudging by the side of the wagon, jumped for the side of it and scrambled up, standing erect to see what Arril was pointing at

It was a great ring of shapen stones standing upright, with other flat stones laid upon their tops Seen from a distance, in the midst of that great space, they did not seem so very high, but as the party drew nearer they loomed enormous, more than twice the height of a man and greater in thickness than the length of a tall man from foot to head All round about the mighty circle, at a distance of about one hundred yards, tents were being pitched and wagons drawn up There were gathered men and women and boys and girls, thousands of them, all in holiday garb and chattering and laughing and greeting each other Further out again, the horses were tethered by the empty chariots whose owners had gone off to talk to friends For this was the great yearly time of meeting, when folks who had not seen each other for twelve months or more could get together and exchange news—births and deaths and marriages and adventures

The most of the folk here assembled were dark and slight, but there were a goodly number of the new-comers of whom Amballo had spoken, tall, fair-haired Celts who were partly disdainful, partly awed by the great old temple built so long ago They came in from the east, and the dark men looked at them with some distrust. But fear was giving place to friendliness as the two races got to understand each other

Amballo's party drew up in an open space, and

began to prepare for several days' stay The Headman, famous as a master craftsman, received many respectful greetings and inquiries after his health After which each friend would look sideways at Arril and Dawn-wind, and ask in rather awed tones

'And who is that?'

To which Amballo always answered proudly 'My son. He has tamed yon beast himself Ay, he is a clever lad'

Arril got tired of this at last, and having picketed Dawn-wind near the wagon and given him water, tucked his arm into Bran's and led him away on a tour of inspection

'If King Evrawc and Madoc the Prince are here, I want thee to see them,' he said 'They are more splendid than any here, and their horses are better'

Bran did not see how anything could be more splendid than some of the chiefs he saw stalking through the crowd, with their gay dyed tunics and gold flashing on neck and arm His eyes were everywhere at once, he was amazed and bewildered, but even in his confusion he took note of the bronze work of the weapons, swords and daggers and spearheads

'I have seen no work here so good as Amballo's,' he remarked. 'The edges are not so thin, nor the shapes so good, and by the colour it is not too well mixed Wah! Amballo is a king of craftsmen.'

'Oh, thou and thy craft!' said Arril impatiently 'What is a craftsman fit for but to make weapons for the hands of warriors?'

'And where would the warrior be if it were not for the craftsman?' demanded Bran 'Ay, and what of the ploughshare and hoe, that tills the ground that

the warrior may eat? What useful thing, tell me, does the warrior do?'

'Bah!' Arril would not argue. 'Oh, look, Bran!'

The crowd had divided respectfully, and through the open space came an old but very erect man in long black robes

'It is one of the priests,' whispered Arril, as the boys shrank aside 'It is said that they can read what is to be'

The priest came by slowly, looking straight before him. Just as he was opposite to the boys, he stumbled a little, and Bran saw that the thong of his sandal had come undone In a moment he was kneeling on the ground at the priest's feet

'May I——' he said, and the priest turned cold steady eyes on him 'May I do up thy shoe?'

'Show me thy hands, that I may see if they are worthy to touch me,' said the priest, and Bran held up his square brown paws. The priest looked at them for a long time, drawing away and frowning.

'Strange hands!' he said at last 'Hands that have brought thee over the sea, and shall bring thee over the sea again Hands that shall cheat the dead of the living, and serve the gods by breaking their laws, and shall hold a kingdom and give it away Ay, do up my shoe, hands of power.'

Bran, not understanding in the least, bent to his task and deftly fastened the thong

'Stand up,' commanded the priest when he had finished, 'and ask me that which thou most desirest to know'

Bran scrambled to his feet and raised his grey eyes to the priest's face.

'I wish to know if I may ever be a craftsman,' he said simply

The priest laughed strangely 'Thou shalt indeed be a craftsman,' he said 'Such a craftsman as this land hath not seen Thou shalt forge a chain for thy neck and thine ankles, and out of that chain thou shalt make a sword that shall conquer a city.'

'I do not understand,' said Bran 'What is a chain? And I have never seen a city.'

'No,' said the priest 'But it shall be so Who art thou?'

Bran wondered very much that this priest, who knew so much, did not know this also However, he answered

'Bran, who was the slave of Amballo, Headman of the Moor Folk'

The priest made no answer to this, but went on as though nothing had happened The crowd stared at Bran for a moment as though he had been greatly honoured, then forgot all about him and began talking again

'What did he say to thee?' asked Arril curiously, as his friend rejoined him

'That I should be a great craftsman,' Bran replied This was all he could make sense of

'He said more than that,' Arril protested

'Oh, a lot of rubbish about kingdoms and chains and gods and swords. I do not care If I may work the bronze, that's all I want'

Just then a great shouting began amongst the crowd, which parted again to the sound of the trampling of horses and the creaking of wheels Arril grasped Bran's arm excitedly

'Look!' he exclaimed 'There they are!'

Through the crowd came a chariot rimmed with shining bronze, drawn by two grey horses who wore about their necks great crescent-shaped collars, or rather breastplates, of copper plated with gold. Gold was on their harness, and plumes waved above their proud heads. Their driver held them in firmly, so that they pranced and champed. Behind the driver stood a tall, fair-haired, fair-bearded man, who wore a leather cap plated with bronze, a twisted torque of gold about his neck, a great gold clasp to his purple cloak, and whose arms were heavy with golden bracelets. His round shield had gold studs on it, the hilt of his sword was gold, and he carried two spears the collars of which were gold also.

'It is he, Evrawc the King!' whispered Arril, almost out of his wits with excitement. 'Said I not he was glorious beyond all others? And look—look! There comes Prince Madoc behind him!'

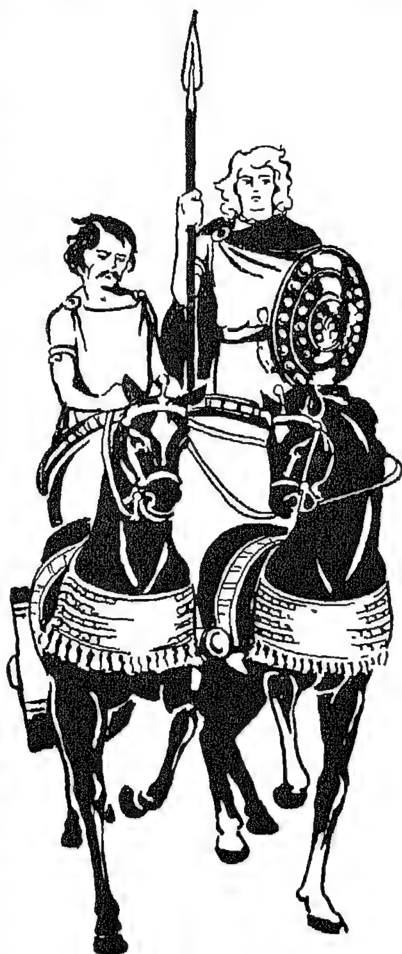
A second, smaller chariot, drawn by two red-brown horses and driven by a small, elderly man, followed King Evrawc's. In it stood a tall boy of fifteen or sixteen, his long fair hair flying round his shoulders. He, too, was a blaze of golden splendour, but he wore a broad-bladed dagger instead of a sword. His young face was beautiful, brave, and proud, his lips smiled a little, but his blue eyes looked neither to the right nor left as he drove through the shouting people.

'There is a prince indeed!' said Arril, looking after the chariot with shining eyes. 'A prince to die for!'

'Why die?' asked Bran calmly. He admired the appearance of Madoc very much, but it was the grave, wise face of Evrawc the King that remained in his mind.

The sun was setting now, and the boys made their

way back to their own group To-morrow would see them all astir before dawn, for it was Midsummer Eve, and the rising of the sun would find all that crowd assembled around the vast stone circle Nevertheless there was little sleep that night



Prince Madoc

Great fires flamed to heaven, and lit up the restless, moving mob with ruddy light and queer, flickering shadows The light gleamed on the enormous stones and made them look as though they were drenched in newly-spilt blood, and the copper and gold on arms and necks threw out sudden flashes and gleams. There was singing, too, or rather chanting,

and as the short summer night wore on a feeling of strained expectancy settled on the gathering. By common consent they began to draw inwards, formed a loose procession in groups under their respective chiefs, and presently the procession started slowly pacing round the circle.

As they drew near to the great openings, Bran glanced within There was a circle of smaller stones inside the outer one, within that again a horse-shoe of seven great trilithons (that is to say, two stones placed on end with a third crossing them), and finally another horse-shoe of smaller single stones He could not make this out all at once, but gradually the plan of the Temple became plain as they circled it about

To the north-east of the circle an avenue of standing stones led away, and the folk now ranged themselves at this end, their attention fixed on a flat stone lying just inside the entrance from the avenue

'Who built this?' Bran, pressed close to Amballo's side, asked in a whisper.

'It was built for Lo, God of the Sun, in the days when there were giants,' Amballo whispered back

Strangely enough, we now know a little more certainly what was the origin of that great circle we call Stonehenge than they did in those days comparatively near to its building. We know that it was built in the time of the stone-workers of the Neolithic Age, and we can guess, in some measure, how the stones may have been slid into place by great slopes of earth, and the labour of many slaves.

There was a faint grey light spreading over the scene now, and the far-off chanting was drawing near Along the avenue a procession of black-robed priests

was coming, and singing as they came. Before the slab they stopped, and the chanting ceased.

Two men came forward, holding between them a boy just entering into manhood, clean-limbed, straight and beautiful. He was crowned and garlanded with flowers, and his wide-open eyes had a strange, fixed look as if he saw something other than the dark priests, the grey stones and the waiting crowd. He did not resist at all as they laid him on the slab, his head thrown back and his throat and breast bare.

The priests made a semicircle about the stone. One, the High Priest, stood in the centre, in his hand a knife of flint. It was considered impious to use for the service of the Sun-god anything but the ancient weapon of their forefathers. On the other side of the stone two boys knelt, holding bowls of earthenware.

The light in the east was brightening fast. The High Priest raised high his knife.

'A sacrifice to Lo!' he cried in a high, piercing voice. 'The Beloved of the Gods is given to the Gods!'

A spark of light gleamed on the horizon. A long beam shot through the length of the avenue, and lay like a finger of gold upon the bare breast of the victim.

'Lo accepts the sacrifice!' cried the priest. The knife went home in the young man's breast. The blood spurted as it was withdrawn, and the two kneeling boys reached forward to catch the red stream in their bowls. When the vessels were filled they rose and went within the circle, the priests following, to where the altar stone lay before the

highest of the trilithons. There the High Priest poured the blood upon the altar, and the sacrifice was complete

'Lo! Lo! Lo in his glory! Thanks be to Lo!' yelled the folk

Bran had looked on calmly He was used to the idea of human sacrifice—had he not nearly been a sacrifice himself? And in this case it was plain that the young man was regarded as being especially favoured But Arril looked rather sick

'We don't do that,' he murmured to Amballo

'Eh? Then how do thy folk honour the gods?' Amballo was extremely surprised

'We give them offerings of cheese and milk, and, if there is bad trouble, sometimes a horse,' Arril explained

'Wah! Thy gods are strange gods And to deny a man the honour of being given to Lo, and living with him in the Land of Day—that would be a queer thing, surely'

CHAPTER XI

THE HORSES OF MADOC

THE sacrifice being over, and the sun now full up and sending long shafts of light across the plain, the crowd streamed away from the Temple and made their way to their own places. The rest of the day was given over to feasting, sport, and barter, and the hubbub was like an English Bank Holiday In several places oxen were roasted whole on the great fires, turned slowly by means of a stake run lengthwise through the body There was a good deal of mead drunk from bronze-bound horns, and the strong stuff loosened people's tongues and made them more noisy than ever

A number of quiet folk, among whom was Amballo, got together and held a market. Gold ornaments, weapons and tools of bronze, dyed cloths, Baltic amber, Whitby jet, shells and glass from overseas, pelts of bear and beaver and wolf, were laid out in an open space to tempt the passer-by Many a young brave, swaggering past with his girl on his arm, would stop to turn over the finery, and barter a pelt for a pair of gold earrings or a necklace of jet. Or an older man, scarred maybe with many battles, would try the edge of one of Amballo's blades, and put down in payment a handful of gold ring-money, detached from a gold armlet on which they swung like keys on a ring Or a hunter would demand a couple of new spearheads in exchange for a bundle of small skins Amballo preferred to be paid in gold.

It was light and easy to carry, compared with a hide or roll of cloth, and being untarnishable, he could exchange it at any time for something he needed Many folk preferred goats as a form of cash, for they could be driven home on their own four feet But the mountain dwellers, living in out-of-the-way



places, liked to take home a roll of cloth to be distributed in their little community All sorts of things served as money

Bran and Arril, naturally, were not much interested in this chaffering They discovered that racing, leaping, and shooting contests were being held, and settled down to watch with all their eyes and shout at the tops of their voices

Arril liked the foot-racing, and Bran was thrilled by the wrestling Then there was a match at shooting at a mark, and Arril turned up his nose

'I could outshoot them all, were I of age to try,' he

remarked loudly, and those near him turned to stare, while a man cuffed his head and told him to mind his manners Arril flushed red and his eyes blazed, and if Bran had not held him firmly, until his temper burned itself out, he would probably have got into worse trouble by knifing the man who had struck him.

Very soon, however, all his interest was absorbed in the chariot-racing The chariots lined up in a row, the horses kicking, prancing, and tossing their beautiful plumed heads Among them the boys could pick out the handsome Prince Madoc, youngest of those competing, holding the reins firmly in strong hands and speaking soothingly to his excited steeds.

A whip cracked, and the chariots dashed forward, wheeling round in a great circle. Those innermost shot ahead at first, and the others tried to swing inwards and cross them More than one wheel caught in the hub of another, and the light chariot pitched sideways, flinging its driver into the dust and tangling its plunging horses in the reins. Both boys held their breath as they watched the young Prince Madoc skilfully steer his horses clear of the wreckage of a chariot and, keeping a little on the outside of the course, watch his chance coolly to cut inwards and take the advantage

'He is holding them in,' said Arril 'They could make twice that speed '

'It seems to me that they are going very fast,' Bran remarked

'What dost thou know of it? There—I said so!'

Madoc, seeing his opportunity, loosened the reins on his horses' necks, at the same time leaning over and speaking to them As though released from a spring they darted forward, swung in front of the

other chariots, and took the inner side of the course. There was no doubt now, the race was Madoc's. Cheers and yells showed how popular he was, as he pulled his horses up at the line, stood for a moment flushed and triumphant, and then flung the reins to his waiting charioteer and stepped down on to the grass. Evidently he was thirsty, for he beckoned to a man who was wandering about with a skin of mead for sale.

Some Lthe boys were running into the circle to compete in jumping, but Arril cared not for them. The horses were all he wanted, and he began to make his way through the crowd, dodging under elbows, to get as near as possible to where Madoc's were standing. Bran followed.

The young Prince, having drunk, was deep in talk with a friend. His father, who had been watching the race, stood near his son with pride in his eyes. The red horses were in charge of the charioteer, and the charioteer was chatting, the reins loosely wrapped about his left arm, with a girl who had edged up and was laughing and teasing him.

Nobody quite saw what happened then. It may have been that one of the defeated drivers, jealous of Madoc, had stolen up on mischief bent, it may have been just someone's thoughtlessness. At any rate, there was the sudden crack of a whip, sounding sharp as a pistol-shot, and a shout. The high-spirited horses, frightened out of their wits, reared and plunged, flinging the careless charioteer to the ground and rolling him over. Then they dashed off at full speed, the crowd giving way before them with cries of terror. The yells only scared the poor creatures more.

The charioteer had been dragged for twenty yards by the reins wound round his wrist, and left sprawling, bruised and dusty, on the ground He sat up now, but shrank away cowed as Prince Madoc, his blue eyes flaming, strode up to him He was evidently going to give the man a thoroughly deserved rating, when a change in the shouts of the bystanders made him look up

In the rocking, swaying chariot a small slight figure was standing—a small figure with long black hair

'Arril!' gasped Bran He had not noticed that his friend was not at his side He must have leaped into the chariot at the moment the horses started off—though what he could possibly do, even if the reins had not been trailing on the ground, out of his reach, no one could imagine It would take a strong man's grip on the reins to bring those fear-maddened steeds to a standstill

But now the crowd fell silent, breathless Prince Madoc forbore to chide his servant, and stood open-mouthed Arril had scrambled on to the front of the chariot, a leap, and he was on the back of the near horse The crowd moaned with excitement. All but Bran, and even he was nervous, expected to see the daring youngster flung to the ground in a moment

Arril was crouching well forward, his head to the horse's ear The poor terrified thing seemed to understand that something friendly and wise was on its back, for it slackened its headlong gallop The other horse sensed the new feeling of confidence, and slackened also The pace became a canter and then a trot At last the horses wheeled neatly, and came pacing back, sweating indeed, and with flicking ears and rolling eyes to show how great their panic

had been, but quiet and completely under Arril's control

The boy himself sat proudly, his hand on the neck of the horse he rode, his knees pressing it comfortably The whole great crowd broke into a cheer, and yelled and stamped itself hoarse

'Who and what art thou?' Prince Madoc gasped, as Arril slid from the shining back and knelt before him

'Arril son of Iolo son of Panna,' was the reply

'I do not know of any such Moreover, these are very strange names'

'Arril the adopted son of Amballo the Bronze-smith, Headman of the Moor Folk,' Arril amended.

'Ha! Now I know Art the lad who rode the moor pony into camp I have heard of it. Arril, son of whomsoever thou wilt! thou hast this day saved my darlings from loss and hurt, and thou hast done that which I did not think could be done! Thou art a little wizard, and I would have thee always with me.'

'I would ask nothing better, O Prince!'

'Thou shalt be my charioteer, in place of this son of a dog of a pig!' He kicked the unfortunate man, who was crawling to his feet to ask for mercy. 'Together we will do wonders, my Arril Thou art very young, but there is no man ever I have seen hath such skill with horses as thou'

'And what is all this?' demanded Evrawc the King, coming up and laying a hand on his son's shoulder

'I will have this lad for my charioteer!' Prince Madoc exclaimed impetuously 'He is the lad who can sit the back of a horse—the son of Amballo the Bronze-smith'

'And what will Amballo say to it?' The King stroked his beard to hide a smile

'Amballo? I'll give him gold—goats—anything he desires But I will not part with my pearl of magic-makers!'

'Well, here comes Amballo We will hear what he says'

The Bronze-smith had heard a wild rumour of the stampede and Arril's feat, and had hurried from his bargaining to find out if his beloved were safe He found Arril kneeling on the ground kissing Prince Madoc's hand adoringly King Evrawc turned to the old man with a smile

'It seems our sons have made such friends that they will not be parted,' he said 'Madoc hath a mind to thy lad'

'My lord!' Amballo was staggered 'But I cannot let him go! He is my son—my adopted son, truly, but dear to me as one of my own And I have no other'

'It is thy right to say whether he shall go or stay,' agreed Evrawc 'Madoc, my son, thou canst not have thy way in this Amballo will not give Arril up'

'What!' Arril started to his feet in a fury 'Wilt not give me up, when I have gained my heart's desire! But I tell thee, old man, I will *not* come back with thee! I *will* stay with my Prince!'

'Arril!' poor Amballo pleaded 'I have loved thee I have made thee my son, I will give thee anything thou wishest. Why wilt thou leave me?'

'What do I care for your bare moors and grey mists and the stupid bronze-working?' cried Arril.

'I will not go back, I say, not alive If thou takest me, thou takest me dead '

Amballo looked mournfully at the ungrateful boy for a long time Then he sighed deeply

'It must be so then, my beloved son,' he said very sadly 'Go where thou art happy I will return childless and alone But wilt thou not say farewell?'

'Farewell, Amballo ' Arril seemed a little ashamed now 'Thou hast been good to me; I thank thee '

'Oh, Arril! shall I never see thee again?' Poor Bran was overcome at the thought of parting with his friend

'Why, surely thou wilt see me—every year at the Feast of Lo Why, Bran, thou silly, art crying?'

Bran, quite broken down and blubbering, threw his arms about Arril and gave him a squeeze that drove the breath out of his body The tears were in the other's eyes too

'I 'll tell thee what, Bran; let us ask the Prince to take thee also Thou couldst serve him in some way '

'No, no!' Bran drew away and wiped the tears from his eyes with the back of his hand 'I must go back with Amballo '

'Then thou lovest him more than thou lovest me!' Arril cried pettishly

'Indeed I love thee best! But, thou seest,' Bran explained, 'Amballo is all alone, and Moran hates him, and he hath no one to help him Also I would be a worker of bronze '

'Oh, thou and thy bronze!' Arril gave him a little push 'Go along, then, old faithful. We will not say farewell yet I shall see thee again ere we part '

'It may be,' replied Bran, and turning, he ran after Amballo, who had gone quietly away

The old man's head was bowed, and he seemed so wrapped up in unhappy thoughts that Bran did not like to speak to him, but followed a little behind

Presently they came face to face with the priest who had spoken to Bran the day before

'There thou goest, Amballo, with thy heart sore for what thou hast lost,' said the priest, 'and dost not see thy luck following thee.'

Amballo looked up with a start, turning his head over his shoulder, and saw Bran

The priest smiled grimly 'Ay A faithful heart and a cunning hand, a brave soul and a strong arm Thou wilt have need of such, Amballo the Master Smith, for no man is master for ever.'

'I knew when first I saw him that he would bring me luck,' Amballo muttered half to himself 'And certainly he is faithful But—he is an Outlander May I give the secrets of the bronze-craft to such as he?'

'The secrets are his He lacks but practice Take him into thy smithy, and teach him all In such a way shalt thou turn away the knife from thy heart.'

CHAPTER XII

OUTCAST

So Amballo and Bran returned to the village of the Moor Folk, leaving Arril behind. Both of them missed him sorely, and Bran's heart ached as they came in sight of the thatched roofs, and he remembered that there was not, and would not be again, any merry madcap to tease and plague him and be his comrade.

Whatever Amballo felt, he said nothing about it, but set to work in the smithy the day after he came home Bran went down with him as usual Neither of them said anything to their neighbours about the words of the priest, or the fact that Bran was to be allowed to work bronze

'I do not know how they would take it,' Amballo had said, talking apart with Bran one night. 'Moran will hate thee more than ever—and me also And the rest of the Moor Folk will surely be angry '

'Let us not tell them, then,' Bran suggested.

'Some day they must know,' Amballo mused 'But perhaps it is as well we do not tell them yet If thou makest a good craftsman thou wilt bring honour to the village and they will be proud of thee '

'I 'll make a good craftsman,' said Bran, boastful for once But he could not help knowing the deftness that was in his strong hands

So no one knew anything of the work that went on inside Amballo's workshop, and Bran learned apace The lads that crushed and smelted the ore were not

allowed within, and were so used to seeing Bran come down with Amballo that they imagined him to be working all day at the bellows as before.

Bran learned to mix and pour, to bind the two halves of a mould together neatly, to chisel and shape and hammer the edge, and always he sang as he worked the charms that had so nearly cost him his life. He was happy, and missed Arril less than he had expected, because this new and fascinating work took up most of his time.

Once or twice he went with Amballo prospecting for new mines, and learned to know the queer marks and stains that the miners called 'fumes' of metal, which showed where ore was to be found. He had his wish, and scrambled down a rope-ladder into the dark pit, and saw the men working by the light of bronze lamps, hammering with mighty strokes and tumbling the bits of rock into baskets which boys brought up to the light.

Amballo was very kind always. In the months that followed they grew to be good companions, and the old man took to talking to the boy as if he were grown up.

'Dost thou wonder why I have taught none of the Moor Folk my craft?' he said once. 'It is because I am weary of trying to teach fools. I taught Moran—and small thanks I have got! And then I would have no more, and cared not if my skill died with me. But thou, Bran—thou hast the eye and the hand. Already thy work is as good as Moran's, and very soon it will be better. The favour of Diwa is on thee.'

Bran thrilled with pleasure at this praise. He had felt that his work was good, but Amballo rarely said

anything about it. A sniff and a grunt was his usual comment when the boy showed what he had done.

Bran's particular pride was an axehead which he had made for himself. It was beautifully balanced, keen and hard, and of a shape a little different from those made by Amballo, for Bran, like a true craftsman, was beginning to feel for his own especial ways of working. He kept it slung from his belt, with a casing of leather over it, so that no one noticed anything unusual about it, and supposed that Amballo had given it to him.



Bran's Axe

One day, however, two of Moran's workmen surprised him as he was making the chips fly from a tree in the forest. The young fellows did not share Moran's enmity towards Bran. Their master had been careful to conceal his jealousy—for to admit envy means that one feels inferior. To them Bran was just a pleasant, hardworking lad who let himself be 'put upon' by Amballo in a surprising way. They thought he must be rather soft in the head to work as hard as he did.

'Greetings, Bran,' they said as they came up.

'Greetings,' answered Bran, wiping the sweat out of his eyes. Then he attacked the tree again.

'Why, thou art a right deft axeman,' remarked one of the men. 'And strong in the arm too.'

Bran grunted and kept on chopping.

'That 's a good axe thou hast there. Let 's see it.'

'Too busy,' said Bran shortly.

But when the tree tottered to its fall, and Bran stood drawing his breath, he had no further excuse to prevent their taking up the axe and running a thumb along its blade.

'Why, that 's a new shape for Amballo,' remarked one. 'He hath used the same axe mould for fifteen years—what for hath he changed it now?'

Bran shrugged his shoulders. He thought of saying that the old one was broken, but realized that when more of the old pattern made their appearance it would be proved a lie.

'It is *not* like Amballo's work,' said the other, examining it closely. A craftsman gets to know every little peculiarity of the work of his fellows, and can tell one man's work from another as we tell handwriting.

'Maybe he hath been trying something new,' Bran suggested.

'Then he hath turned young again. Besides, the hafting is not so neat as Amballo's is wont to be.'

Bran decided that there was quite enough of this, and taking back his axe he began to chop the fallen trunk into logs. The two youths, after watching him curiously, went off together discussing the problem. Bran felt decidedly uncomfortable.

However, he reflected that the revelation was bound to come sooner or later. He did not see that it would matter very much, if he were found out.

Amballo, when he heard of it, agreed with him that there was nothing to worry about

At any rate, it did not seem that anything was to come of it Whether or not the young men had told Moran about the axe, the days lengthened into weeks without anything happening. Bran gained in skill rapidly, and began to have pleasant visions of bringing Arril a knife or spearhead made by himself, when he should see his friend at the Midsummer Festival

Winter had come, and the shortest day was past, when a change might be noticed among the Moor Folk Bran saw that instead of greeting Amballo with the respect they were accustomed to give him as Headman and Master Smith, they gave him sideways looks and surly, grudging speech. Knots of men and women were found talking together in low tones, and when Bran or Amballo appeared they would fall silent and follow them with sullen eyes

'What is it?' Bran asked Amballo anxiously 'Why do they scowl so?'

'It is Moran's doing, I am sure of that,' was the gloomy answer. 'Now I think that we should have told the Moor Folk of thy bronze-working, Bran, when those lads first saw thine axe'

'Oho, is that it?' Bran whistled 'So they did tell Moran after all.'

'Ay, and doubtless he hath been spying on us When the fire was roaring, and thou and I hard at our work, a man could well steal up behind and peer through a crack in the wall And now that Moran hath made sure, he is setting the folk against both thee and me.'

'What will he do, thinkest thou?' Bran asked

'Why, I think he will stand up at the next Mote

and accuse me of teaching the secrets of the craft to an Outlander'

'But thou canst say that the priest——'

'I do not think they will believe me I have been foolish I should have told them at the first. Now it looks but a poor tale'

'Then what will happen?'

'I will speak to them Headman have I been these thirty years, and Master Smith for forty My word should surely weigh heavier than Moran's—and yet—I do not know'

'And if they do not hold with thee?'

'Then,' said Amballo slowly, 'I think that they will either kill us or cast us out Nay'—he tried to speak cheerfully—'it cannot be that they will kill us And if they cast us out, I will take my skill elsewhere'

'But will not all the Folk of the Hills be against thee?'

'The Folk of the Hills, maybe But the people of the valleys and of the coast will buy where they can, and reck not where it comes from. I can go from village to village mending and making'

'Oh, no, no, no!' exclaimed Bran. The thought of the poor old man, outcast at the end of his days from his home and comforts, and toiling painfully along the rough tracks, was too pitiful 'Look, I have it. If thou canst not persuade the folk, I will be the one to go Do thou agree that I shall be cast out, and they will forgive thee for the sake of thy great skill'

'But—it would be death for thee'

'Little fear! Thou knowest how hard and strong I am I can get me food in the forest And, see! Why should I not do as thou saidst but now—go

from village to village making and mending? My skill is great enough for that'

'It is,' agreed Amballo 'But thou art so young! Well, we will hope it will not come to that. But if it should, go thou down to the cave where thou didst first try the bronze-working, and I will bring thee food there. It may be that in time the Moor Folk will forgive thee'

'If I am cast out,' agreed Bran, 'I will meet thee there, and we will talk of what is to be I am sorry that I have brought this trouble on thee'

'Trouble was bound to come, if not this way, then another,' said Amballo. 'Moran would see to that.'

The days between this talk and the time of the Mote—it was to be held at New Moon—dragged slowly for Amballo and Bran The old man would not, had he been younger, have dreamed for a moment of sending Bran into exile for his sake But he knew that he was too infirm to stand a wandering life

The day of the Mote came, and towards evening the men and women gathered in a big circle in the open space before the village, where an upright stone marked the Place of the God. The usual sacrifice was made, and the blood of a goat splashed upon the stone Then the business began

Amballo took his place in the centre of the Elders' Bench, with Moran at his right hand, and Evain, another of the village leaders, on his left Bran, of course, was among the boys at the back Scarcely was the Mote opened than Moran jumped to his feet

'Men of the Moor,' he exclaimed passionately, 'I say that he who sits in the seat of the Headman is unworthy, and that if he rule our Mote the favour of the gods will not be upon it'

There was a murmur through the crowd that showed they were expecting this.

'For thirty years,' Moran went on, 'Amballo hath been Headman of the Moor Folk, for more than that he hath been reckoned Master Smith. Now I say, is it by right of skill alone that he hath held this place? Nay, but because of his pride and jealousy he would suffer no man to work with him. Me he taught, but gave me not the charms which would make me equal with him. Hath he ever taken any of ye into his smithy to learn his trade? As slaves he hath kept ye all, toiling at the crushing of the ores and the tending of furnaces, and as slaves ye would have remained, save for what I, Moran, have taught ye.'

'True, true! That is very true!' assented the villagers.

'And now he must needs take this Outlander, this slave, this waif picked up in the market-place, and teach him—*him!*—our ancient and sacred craft!'

A savage growl rose from the crowd.

'Was it not enough,' Moran went on, 'that he should take as his son that wolf-whelp, that devil-child, Arril?—whom we are well rid of. It is plain that Amballo loves not his own people. He would set up an Outlander over us. He would keep the Sons of the Moor out of their rights as Masters of the Bronze! He is false to the Moor Folk and to their gods!'

'Away, away with Amballo!' shouted more than half the villagers, stamping and storming; 'and away with the redhead, the beggar-brat, the Outlander!'

Two young fellows—one of them was Garm, eager to work off his ancient spite — seized Bran and dragged him into the circle.

'Here he is!' yelled Garm 'Let us tear him to pieces here!'

Amballo stood up He was rather white, but kept a brave face.

'Folk of the Moor,' he said, and the people quieted before the voice that had commanded them for thirty years, 'since when have ye taken orders from a slave?'

'Garm the slave hath no right to lift up his voice in our Mote,' agreed Evain Amballo went on:

'He who says that I am false to the Moor Folk lies When have I done aught that might bring hurt?'

'Not until now, certainly,' said the reasonable Evain 'But this matter of teaching an Outlander is serious, Amballo It is against the will of the gods'

'Nay, ye are mistaken. From the mouth of a priest at the Festival of Lo I had the command to teach him'

'Which priest?' demanded Moran

'I do not know his name. But surely strange words of knowledge were in his mouth'

'Huh!' said Moran scornfully 'And shall we believe this tale, Folk of the Moor? If it had been true, why did Amballo not tell us openly?'

Amballo saw that he was caught on the weak point of his story, but he tried to put a good face on the matter

'I feared that in your foolishness ye would do even as ye are doing now,' he said. 'Therefore I waited until the lad should prove himself a good craftsman, and no shame to ye'

'Pah!' said someone 'Fine talk, Amballo'

'We do not believe thee,' said another

'Yet Amballo hath not told us lies before,' came a third voice

Amballo sighed

'It is ye who go against the will of the gods, not I,' he said. 'Yet, seeing ye are determined in your stubbornness, will it content ye if I send Bran away?'

'Ay,' spoke up Bran for the first time, 'send me away, who am the cause of this trouble, and I will not come near your village any more'

'And spread the secrets of the craft far and wide?' exclaimed Moran 'Kill him rather!'

'Kill him!' shouted several in the crowd, but others cried 'Let him go!'

Evain interposed again

'Look ye,' he said slowly 'We do not know but that Amballo hath spoken truth If he have, then the anger of the gods will be on us if we slay Bran But if he have spoken falsely, will not the anger of the gods fall on him and the boy too? Now it seems to me that the gods cannot be very angry, or they would not have let Bran work at the bronze for so many moons unpunished Nevertheless, it is strange that Amballo did not tell us the words of the priest at first I do not know what to trow in So I say, let Bran go forth, and leave the gods to deal with him As for Amballo, he is Master Smith of all the Moor, and the glory of the village Let him rule in peace'

Evain's sensible words made a deep impression Moran was not much liked, and Amballo had always been very greatly respected Moran saw that he was not going to get the whole of his will, and his face grew black with anger He feared, however, to say more, and sat down sullenly

Amballo and Bran exchanged a long look Then suddenly shaking himself free from those who held him, the boy darted past the seats of the elders and down the hill towards the forest.

CHAPTER XIII

SETTLES ACCOUNTS WITH GARM

BRAN made for the smithy, where he stopped only to pick up his axe, and then ran on. He crossed the river, and made for the little cave where he had appointed to meet with Amballo It was quite a snug shelter, and he set to work to make it more secure and comfortable. Amballo would come to him as soon as he could, but perhaps that would not be until next day Meanwhile the wolves would be out, and he must have some safe barricade He cut down saplings and blocked one end with stakes, leaving the other, where when night came he would build a fire, open to the air. Then he gathered a good store of wood, piled up some dried leaves for a bed, and finally, as it was getting dark, kindled a little flame for company He was desperately hungry, but had no bow, and was not enough of a hunter to kill a deer with knife or axe! He did, however, make a couple of rabbit snares out of thongs which he carried in his pouch as boys nowadays carry string He made his snares by suspending a loop from a bent sapling, hidden in the opening of a rabbit's burrow If bunny should incautiously push his head through, the noose would pull tight, the sapling spring up, and there was Bran's breakfast But he was not very hopeful about it, not being used to foraging in this sort of country.

Then he drew his belt as tight as he could, and curling up went to sleep in spite of hunger He woke a good deal during the night, uneasy, fearful of wolves, lonely and ravenous, and with the first light he got up and went to see if his snares had caught anything He walked softly, not to disturb any creature that might be feeding near.

His snares were, as he feared, empty But, turning away rather disconsolately, he saw, sitting up and watching him inquisitively, a young brown rabbit Like a flash Bran hurled his axe, and, more by good luck than good aim, knocked the creature head over heels and stunned it This was fortune indeed! In two seconds the rabbit was dead, and in fifteen minutes Bran was sitting in front of his fire toasting bits of it on the end of a stick, and feeling much more courageous Having fed, there was nothing more to do but wait for Amballo Bran withdrew a little further into his cave, and sat with his arms about his knees, thinking

His thoughts were not very cheerful It is no joke to be homeless and outcast at the age of thirteen, especially in a country that is strange to you Bran was hardy and brave, but it was no wonder that the prospect daunted him a little However, summer was ahead of him, and that would make it easier. By next winter he would have grown accustomed to the life Well—he would not think of winter just now

Then he went on to think of Arril, and wondered how he was faring Alas! he could not go to the Summer Festival now, for folk from the moors would be there and might make trouble Bran did not know where Evrawc might have his dwelling, or he

would have gone to seek his friend and try if he could find shelter there

Suddenly a footstep outside roused him from his musing Amballo at last! Bran looked up with a welcoming smile, and saw—Garm

His enemy had a smile of triumph on his face, and a bare knife in his hand It was plain he meant to make an end of the old quarrel there and then—and Bran was younger than he by five or six years, and trapped in the cave, of which he had himself closed the other way out!

Bran did not stop to think His axe was out of reach behind him, his knife was in its sheath at his side, but he snatched up a lump of rock and hurled it at Garm so hard and surely that the big boy's knife flew out of his hand

Garm gave a bellow of pain and anger, and jumped forward to seize the smaller boy Bran knew that it was useless to struggle, that his enemy was larger and stronger than himself, and he could not hope to wrestle him down by sheer strength, so he crouched and met Garm's attack by gripping him about the thighs and twining his sinewy legs about the other's knees Garm rained blows on Bran's back and head, but the said head was pressed too closely against him for the full force of the blows to fall on it, and the back was as tough as wood with much work at the bellows

Bran wriggled himself into the position he wanted, and then stiffened all his muscles suddenly Garm swayed, clutched, and fell over bump, while Bran loosed his hold and jumped away, over his fallen foe, out of the cave He had thought it all out in those few seconds before he threw Garm It was no use

running away—Garm's longer legs could carry him faster, in spite of his crooked side; and, moreover, if he allowed himself to be chased into the forest he might miss Amballo Also, he wanted to make an end of this

So instead of fleeing, the moment he was outside he leaped at the piled-up rocks and scrambled up them, and though Garm gathered himself up at once and followed, Bran was out of his reach before he could lay hands on him Now Garm was afraid to scramble up the rocks, for while he did so he would be at Bran's mercy, and Bran's knife was out now So he stood still and glared, and Bran, dancing in triumph on the top of his pile, put out his tongue and pulled faces at him

Garm shook his fist Bran tossed a small pebble and hit him in the mouth Then he turned away and made as if to get down the other side Garm rushed round Bran met him with a stone which took him on the nose, and dodged away again It was like a very deadly game of peep-bo or King of the Castle

Bran kept his enemy running to and fro until Garm was gasping for breath, and then played his final trick Straightening up with a startled look, he peered over Garm's head into the wood as if he saw something there which frightened him. Naturally Garm turned to look too, and in that moment Bran leaped from the rock upon Garm's back with all his solid weight Garm was thrown violently forward, and where he fell he lay, for Bran's knife was sticking in his back between his shoulder-blades, and the old quarrel was ended Garm was dead

Bran took his knife up and wiped it, but he did not

put it back into its sheath Footsteps again were coming through the trees, and he had no mind to be caught a second time. So he waited, knife in hand, until to his relief he saw that it was really Amballo at last Amballo with a bundle on his back and a bow in his hand, very much surprised to see Bran standing with drawn knife over the body of Garm

'He followed me,' Bran explained, 'and I have killed him'

'So it seems,' said Amballo, looking at the knife wound. 'Now I'll warrant Moran sent him'

'I suppose so,' Bran agreed 'Moran wishes me to die'

'Moran shalt think thou *hast* died!' Amballo exclaimed 'I will tell him that Garm slew thee, and that I was angry and killed Garm As indeed I should have done had he really slain thee I shall have to pay for him, but that is no matter'

'It is a very good idea,' said Bran 'So I can go free without being hunted'

'I have brought thee a bow and arrows,' said Amballo, changing the subject, 'and food, and some tools for shaping bronze'

'Oh, thou art good to me, Amballo!' cried Bran 'Now I have all I need And I have fed, for I killed a rabbit'

'Good lad!' Amballo looked pleased 'I see thou canst fend for thyself. But my heart is very heavy for thee'

'I shall do well,' Bran reassured him

'First Arril, and now thee,' Amballo went on 'I am left lonely indeed' He laid a hand on Bran's rough head and tilted it back 'Thou hast been a faithful lad,' he said 'I cared not for thee at the

first, but now I shall miss thee very sorely Yet we shall meet again.'

He was silent for a little, then went on·

'Hark 'ee, Bran Thou shalt come back here, perhaps once in six moons, and when thou comest, go to the smithy by night and lay a sprig of oak-leaves on the slab. So I shall know that thou art here, and will seek thee out, and bring thee news of the village, and thou wilt tell me how thou farest'

'It is a good thought,' Bran agreed 'I will go south first, to the Fisher Folk who live by the shore—for I come of Fisher Folk, and was a fisher before thou didst buy me And then maybe I will go on the plains by the Great Stone Temple, and so round and back along the moor'

'Thou must find a place to winter in,' Amballo advised him

'So Now I will go, for I must not be found here if they are to believe that I am dead'

Amballo put his hands on the boy's shoulders and looked into his honest grey eyes

'Thou hast a brave heart,' he said 'Farewell—my son'

CHAPTER XIV

EVRAWC'S DUN

So Bran became a wanderer—a sort of travelling tinker, a mender of old tools and weapons, selling his handicraft from village to village in exchange for food, shelter if it were cold or stormy, an occasional piece of cloth to wrap himself in or bits of bronze which he could remake

He spent some time with the Fisher Folk of the coast, going out in a coracle and catching lobsters for old times' sake Then, it being now high summer, he wandered on and lost himself for days in a great forest It did not trouble him much, however, for he had his bow, and if he were not so deadly a shot as Arril, he was a much better stalker, having more patience

After that he came out into a cleared space where there were fields, and a little hamlet enclosed with a double stockade filled in with earth and stones He stayed here awhile and worked, and having been directed to another village, passed on there As he had told Amballo, he made his way eastward, but not so far as the plain of the Great Temple, then turned north until he came to the sea again, and then west once more. In this way he established a circle of wandering

He spent the winter in a fishing village, and thoroughly enjoyed himself When spring came, he made for the moors and Amballo's village, and, as they had arranged it, met secretly with the Headman to learn the news and get some fresh ingots of bronze.

Amballo reported that all was quiet. The people had returned to their loyalty, and Morian was lying low. The old man seemed much relieved that Bran had got through the winter safely, and remarked that he had grown very much. Bran stayed three days hidden in the forest, and then went off on his rounds again.

The folk of the villages he visited got to know and welcome him. It was a great comfort to them to be able to buy fresh tools and weapons in between the regular cheaping tides, and to get their cauldrons mended or their old swords smelted down into daggers or spearheads.

Besides this, Bran was welcome for the news he brought. He could take messages from one village to another, acting as a sort of postman by word of mouth. He found out, too, that the folk he visited were greedy for new tales, and set himself to pick up stories in one village and hand them on at another. He was a clever teller of tales, and often of an evening would have the whole population gaping and gasping and laughing and exclaiming at one of his legends. Folk began to watch for the visits of 'Bran the Bronze-smith.'

He was not at all unhappy. The wandering life suited him, his early years in the fishing village had made him able to stand any weather, and he enjoyed the feeling of being his own master. He had any amount of adventures which cannot be told here. On one occasion he visited a great marsh with a shallow lake in it, and found there a band of dark, shy folk who were making an island of sunken logs and bundles of brushwood, on which, they told him, they meant to build a village where they could be at

peace, away from the intrusive fair-heads. They were inclined to distrust Bran's tawny hair.

His only trouble was lack of news of Arril. The first year he had heard from Amballo that he had met the boy at the Festival of Lo, and found him well and in high spirits But the second year Amballo broke his leg early in June, and could not stand the journey The third year he was able to go down to the Temple, and though King Evrawc was there, neither Prince Madoc nor Arril was with him. Amballo had been unable to find out why

It was in the following spring that Bran made up his mind to do some exploring further afield He had already widened his circle considerably, and inquired as he went for the Dun (or town) of King Evrawc Most people had heard of him, but so far no one knew anything more certainly than that he dwelt somewhere towards the north

The word 'king' must not be understood in any way as meaning the ruler of a country The title can only be applied to Evrawc because about a dozen little villages owned his overlordship, while having chiefs of their own They might or might not follow him to battle, according as they felt inclined, but Evrawc was a person of strong will whom most people found it best to obey

So you see Bran, on a bright autumn morning when the blackberry leaves were turning red, and clusters of dark fruit covered the bushes by the trackway, striding sturdily along with his pack on his back and a heavy spear in his right hand His bow was slung over his shoulder, and at his belt he carried his knife and axe, a wallet for food, and a little pouch containing flint, tinder, and a lump of iron pyrites for

kindling fire He was pretty well laden, but his equipment hampered him not at all

He was sixteen years old now, very broad and strong, and able to hold his own with most men Not that he generally needed to do so, for he made friends wherever he went, and was not of a quarrelsome kind

To-day as he went he sang lustily He was content with all the world, for had not the Headman of the last village he passed through told him that he was one of King Evrawc's men, and that Evrawc's own Dun lay not more than two days' journey to the north? He had said also that the land was so well kept that there was no need to fear robbers Bran had laughed. He had passed through many desolate places in the course of his travels, and had now and then fallen in with bands of outlaws, men of no home, who lived by hunting and thieving. They had been glad enough to give him a good meal and a welcome by their fire in exchange for his work No, Bran was not afraid of robbers

He had slept the night before under a bush, wrapped in his cloak of bearskin and heedless of the light frost. And now he felt sure that he could not be very far from the Dun of Evrawc the King.

He came out all at once from the woody, overgrown track he had been following into an open plain, from which the trees had been cleared, and beyond which in the distance he could see hills Here were cornfields, showing now only whitish stubble since the harvest was over and ploughing not yet begun Beyond that rose up a big stockade, a mighty fortification such as Bran had never seen before

Round about it ran a moat, and beyond the moat

a mound nearly as high as the stockade There was an opening in the mound, and through it Bran could just see the gleam of the water and a raised draw-



bridge Beyond the stockade smoke went up, and here and there he could catch a glimpse of thatched roofs

He did not look long at the town, however, for between the mound and the cornfields there was a

flat, trampled space, and on this space riders were exercising, trotting and galloping and swinging their horses about, under the command of a slim person who sat a small light pony as though he were part of it

Something about this slim black-haired figure was familiar to Bran, and when he saw it ride forward and belabour one of the unfortunate riders with a rod, at the same time screaming high-pitched abuse, he was quite sure This was certainly Arril, giving a riding lesson Bran felt sorry for the pupils

He came forward through the fields, and as he came he could hear the words Arril was pouring out

'Thou ride!' he shouted 'Put a pig—yes, a pig! —in the saddle and it would cut a better figure! It 's a shame and disgrace to a noble creature to set thee on its back, thou sack of meal, thou clay-headed dodderpol, thou stiff-legged, paddy-handed heron! Grip her with thy knees, thou fool, and don't split her mouth with thy clumsy pulling! Ach! It is more than I can stand Get thee down I 'll have no more of this '

The man dismounted, crestfallen, and went away with hanging head leading his horse Arril hit him once more for luck, swung his pony about, and became aware of Bran grinning at the edge of the cornfields He had dropped his pack and was sitting on it, but he rose up as, with a shout that made all the horses prance and rear and their riders look very uncomfortable, Arril came galloping headlong down upon his friend Any one else would have thought that he was going to be ridden down, but Bran knew Arril and stood his ground Sure enough, a foot away from him the pony was pulled up Arril

flung himself from its back and into Bran's arms Bran gave him a mighty hug that made him gasp

'Oh, Bran, Bran!' he panted, 'let me go before all my ribs are cracked!'

Bran released him, and Arril took his friend by the shoulders and looked him up and down

'How thou art grown, Bran!' he exclaimed 'So wide and thick, and thou hast great lumps of muscle on thine arms and legs. Wow! I shall not fight with thee All the same, I think I could beat thee in a race'

'Very likely,' said Bran. 'Thou art just the same, Arril, only taller'

'And how art thou living now? Where hast thou been all this time? I heard from Amballo how they had cast thee out, and I looked to see thee long ere this.'

Bran told him briefly of his wanderings. Arril tried to lift his pack, and exclaimed at its weight

'Dost thou really carry that load, and tramp from place to place? I wonder thou art not dead'

'It is not heavy,' said Bran, and lifted it with one hand 'And thou, Arril? How dost thou?'

'Oh, well! well! Just now I am teaching these fools to ride—but they never will However, I have had enough of them, and I want to talk to thee Go, all of ye!' he shouted to the men, who were staring from their fidgeting horses They did not seem at all sorry to obey

'And now, come into the Dun and eat, and tell me about everything' Arril threw his arm about Bran's neck in the old way, and, leading his pony, drew him towards the fort.

'And thou tell me,' Bran answered, shouldering

his pack and stepping out Exchanging news they sauntered forward

'Ho,' said Bran presently, 'who comes here?'

A red horse with a white star was cantering over the field towards them The rider, tall, fair-haired, with gold on arm and breast, sat his horse easily and with dignity, though not with that look of being absolutely part of it that Arril had.

'It is Prince Madoc,' replied Arril

'Oh. I did not know him with hair on his face.'

Madoc, now twenty years old, had indeed cultivated a long fair moustache which rather changed his appearance He was as handsome as ever, and Arril evidently adored him

'And to think he never rode until I taught him!' said Arril under his breath

'Ho, Arril,' cried Madoc as he reached them 'Who is this that thou hast captured?'

'It is Bran!' Arril announced 'I have told thee of him. My Bran, who was with me when Amballo bought me'

'Oh, ay,' said Madoc carelessly, 'I remember' Then he looked Bran over keenly, and smiled 'I should like to see those big shoulders in my Warrior Band,' he added 'Wilt follow me, Bran?'

'There, Bran!' exclaimed Arril, breathless with delight But Bran looked up at the Prince, and shook his head

'I am no warrior,' was his unmoved answer

'No warrior!' cried Madoc 'With that great bow and heavy spear!'

'They are for hunting,' Bran stated. 'I am a craftsman, not a fighter.'

'Art a coward, perchance'

'I have fought for my life, and killed,' was the calm reply. 'I thank thee, lord, for I know thou meanest me honour. But I would rather not join thy band.'

'As thou wilt,' said Madoc scornfully. 'It is not an honour that is offered twice.' He put his horse to a canter and rode away.

'Art thou mad, Bran?' demanded Arril angrily, 'or art thou really a coward?'

Bran looked at him smiling.

'Why should I fight for a man I do not know, in quarrels that do not concern me?' he asked.

Arril stared. 'Madoc's Warrior Band is famous through all the countryside,' he said.

'For what? Burning a village or two, and slaying a dozen poor lads who have no quarrel other than their leader's pride?'

'I think thou must be a coward,' cried Arril hotly, 'thus to talk of war. Hast thou no care for glory?'

'Can I eat it?' said Bran. 'If I lived, the glory would go to the Prince. If I died, I think I should not much care whose was the glory.'

'Well'—Arril felt that as usual he was getting the worst of it in an argument with Bran—'thou hast churlishly refused to serve my Prince, and he despises thee. He thinks I have a coward for a friend, and maybe he will despise me too. I hate thee, Bran!'

Bran looked at him sadly. He was very much grieved to have fallen out with Arril so soon after meeting him again, but he had no intention of giving in. He was an older and harder person than the boy who had wept in the heather because he had quarrelled with his friend.

'I am very sorry, Arril,' he said. 'But I choose my own road. I will go away now if thou wishest.'

'Thou canst not go,' answered Arril pettishly 'Thou art my guest, and I must see thee fed and housed, or dishonour is upon me Come into the Dun—I 'll speak for thee to the Guest-Master He'll give thee thy fill of eating, which is all thou carest for '

Bran did not reply to this unjust speech He had half a mind to turn and go then and there, but he remembered that Arril's tantrums were soon over, and he might hope to be forgiven presently Also, he very much wished to see the inside of the Dun

So he followed Arril meekly over the drawbridge and through the gate, where a couple of warriors stood on guard They saluted Arril, who seemed to be a person of some importance now

Within the stockade the houses were ranged on either side of a broad central way There was no other attempt at planning, they were built anyhow, entrances facing in all directions, some close together, some fairly far apart, some big and some mere hovels Some were of wood, some of wattle and clay, some were thatched and others were shingled All, however, were dark within and smoky, and had curtains of skin hung over the doors

Arril, marching haughtily ahead, still leading his horse, took Bran up to a thatched house and smote on the lintel with his whip A fat man, twinkling-eyed and bald-headed, came limping out

'A guest for thee, Hao,' announced Arril. 'A travelling bronze-smith, Bran by name, a mender of tools and weapons He 'll put a patch on thy old cauldron if thou feedest him well Have no fear! He 's but a tame rat when all 's said, for all his broad chest and big spear, and loves not fighting '

Hao looked Bran up and down, and smiled still

further The boy's mouth was shut hard, and his eyes were coldly angry

'I will look to him, Master Arril,' said Hao 'Come within, Bronze-smith, the pot 's on the boil.'

'I thank thee,' answered Bran

'Hark to him!' Arril mocked, still angrier because he could not rouse Bran 'Art eager enough when it comes to eating, but for war thou hast no stomach Now I know thou art a coward,' he added fiercely 'If any had spoken so to me I 'd have killed him—and a blow from thy fist would knock me senseless.'

'Perhaps that is why I did not strike,' said Bran, and followed Hao into the hut

'Heed not young Master Arril overmuch,' Hao said, limping towards the fire and piling more wood upon it 'He 's sharp of tongue, and has maybe too good a thought of himself. I can tell thou 'rt no coward, smith, by thy steady eye '

Bran showed his white teeth in a grin, and sat down by the flat stone in the centre of the hut, on which burned the fire Hao continued, fishing about with the flesh-hook in the pot that swung over the flames·

'As for me, I don't know that I hold with fighting—anyway, not if I can help it Look 'ee, I got a spear-thrust in my ankle when I was about thine age, going out in a foray under my lord Evrawc, and never have I walked straight since. So now I 'm only fat old Hao of the Guest-House, and glad all the same to welcome a fine stout lad like thyself and give him food Here now, here 's goat's flesh boiled in milk, and onions '

He held out to Bran a steaming wooden platter, and the boy fell to with a good will. Hao squatted down by him and went on chattering

'This young Master Airil, now, the Prince picked up at the Feast of Lo a two-three years agone. And he 've taught the Prince to sit the back of a horse as if he were grown to it—which is an outlandish custom, say I. Myself, I 'd have to be strapped to the creature afore I 'd stay on—not that I 'd let myself be dragged within an arm's length of it.'

Bran heartily agreed.

'But the Prince, his heart is set on the young scamp like as never was, and will not hear a word against him. Not that I 've aught to say, only that he surely does think overly much of himself, and I 'm not the only one that says so. I don't mind his haughty ways myself—I 'm only old Hao—but the warriors do grumble mightily at being made fools of, they say, by a boy like. It 's my belief they 'd well like to see him elsewhere. I don't know that the King 's so pleased—he hath a wise head on 's shoulders. But he saith naught. Have some more goat's flesh, youngster.'

'I will,' said Bran.

'It 's in my mind that something 's in the wind,' Hao went on, ladling out another good helping. 'All this drilling of warriors cannot be for naught. I 've heard tell that Black Karko of the North is stirring—if so there 'll be work of thy kind in the forging of spearheads and sword-blades. Udian our smith hath his hands full already.'

'That will be well for me,' said Bran.

'He hath but little time for the mending, so much is there to make,' said Hao. 'I rede thee take thy pack out to the field in the evening, when the men are playing. And take out that big bow of thine—likely they 'll let thee shoot.'

'I 'm not a great shot, but I might try,' answered Bran. 'Evening, sayest thou? I 'll sleep, and after I 'll look at thy cauldron.'

He curled himself up in a corner and dozed away the afternoon. Hao never stopped talking once, and Bran made a few short answers, but hardly knew what he was saying. When the sun began to sink, flooding the Dun with golden light, he stretched mightily, yawned, and ran his fingers through his lion's mane. Then he took his bow, slung his quiver over his shoulder, and made for the entrance to the stockade.

Out on the flat space beyond the mound the men were gathering, stripped for their games. Targets were set up, and courses marked for racing. Women, girls, and elderly men sat and strolled, watching the exercises.

Bran wandered about, watched a race being run, and laughingly declined to join it, shot an arrow or so for good-fellowship, hitting the target every time, but never the centre, and finally arrived at a group surrounding two wrestling boys. Wrestling was the sport Bran most enjoyed. He had often played with the young men of the villages he passed through, and had gained some skill. So now, as the combatants parted, sweating and breathless, Bran threw down his pack and bow and stepped forward.

'Let me try a fall,' he suggested.

'Who 's this?' demanded a big man with a scar running across his forehead to the bridge of his nose.

'Bran the Bronze-smith,' Bran answered. 'A wanderer.'

'Oh, the lad who walked up this morning while Master Airil was trying to get us murdered!' said a

youth 'Looks a sturdy fellow Take him on, Gow'

Gow, a fair-haired boy a little older than Bran, came forward willingly Bran tossed off his tunic, and stepped to meet him They grinned at one another, and clinched Bran put his knee under the other boy's thigh, jerked him backwards, and had him pinned to the ground before he knew what threw him

'A throw! A throw to the smith!' shouted the crowd

'Hadst me before I knew,' grunted Gow 'Let me up, and I 'll be ready for thee next time.'

Bran released him, and they clinched again. This time Bran got his opponent by the waist and slung him clean over

'Thou art outmatched, Gow,' said the man with the scar 'A bonny wrestler is the smith! Come, another to match him, for the honour of the Dun!'

There was some hesitation now that Bran had shown his skill Then a young man, perhaps twenty years old, stepped forth. The contest was longer this time, the two of them swaying locked in each other's arms for several minutes Then the onlookers saw that Bran had the other's arm twisted behind his back, and was slowly forcing him down upon his knees. A minute more, and the man dropped down with a gasp

'Thou hast the best, lad,' he panted, and Bran let go

One or two more tried their luck, but Bran was too much for them He had picked up quite a number of throws, and worked out others for himself; and this, coupled with his strength and endurance, which were far beyond his age, made him already a

formidable wrestler. At last every one declined to tackle him.

'Well, for the honour of the Dun,' said the man with the scar, 'I must e'en put thee down myself, lad. Though thou hast put up a right good fight, and I 'm loth to do it.'

He was a great six-foot fellow with wide shoulders, a huge chest, and mighty muscles, and Bran smiled as he looked at him.

'I do not think that I can throw *thee*,' he said.

'Wilt give me best, then, and cry off?'

'Nay,' said Bran quietly, 'I 'll not cry off *before* I 've been thrown.'

'I 'll do it as softly as I can,' Scar-face assured him. 'But if thou gripp'st too tight, I may have to hurt thee.'

'Come then,' was all Bran answered.

Scar-face stripped and stepped forward, evidently not quite liking his task. He spread out his great arms to seize Bran, but the boy dodged, stooped, and ran in under the big man's grasp. He set his powerful arms about Scar-face's thigh, shoved with all the weight of his shoulders, and the bystanders squealed with surprise and excitement as the great fellow overbalanced and pitched headlong over Bran's back!

'Thou little demon! I 'll show thee!' Scar-face was up in a moment, between rage and laughter, and came at him again. This time there was no escape. Bran was caught into the mighty arms, and writhe and strain as he would, he could not break free. He twisted his legs about those of Scar-face, but all to no purpose. He was forced down and down, until he was pinned to the ground in a grip there was no getting out of.

'Thou hast me,' Bran confessed in muffled tones, his mouth being pressed into the earth

Instantly Scar-face let go, put his hands under Bran's shoulders and lifted him to his feet

'Thou art a plucky, gallant lad,' he exclaimed 'I am right sorry I had to put thee down, but, for the honour of the Dun, seest thou——'

'I knew I could not beat thee,' grinned Bran 'Not yet I thank thee for a good bout'

Then it seemed as though a whirlwind struck him Lithe arms were flung about his shoulders, and a face was pressed against his

'Oh, Bran! My Bran! Well done, Bran! Oh, grandly done! Thou hast beaten them all, save only Shan Scar-face, and he is twice thy size I am proud of thee'

'Wert ashamed of me a while ago,' said Bran dryly

'I know now thou art no coward And oh, I was afraid Shan would kill thee! Come with me now, my splendid one, and tell me all thine adventures'

With which Arril marched his friend away, leaving the crowd laughing and nudging one another

CHAPTER XV

THE WISDOM OF KING EVRAWC

OTHERS besides Arril had watched, unnoticed, Bran's exploits King Evrawc, walking beside Prince Madoc, stood still to look on and smiled approvingly.

'Who is yon burly lad?' he asked 'I have not seen him before'

'A travelling smith, the friend of Arril my charioteer,' Madoc answered shortly

'Friend, eh? They are as unlike as two could well be,' said Evrawc 'Well, son, I guess thou hast taken into thy Band so likely a warrior'

'Not I I offered, and he refused me Hath the heart of a field-mouse for all his breadth of body'

Evrawc glanced shrewdly at his son

'Art not too good a judge of men, Madoc. 'Twas no coward's deed to wrestle with Shan Scar-face'

'Bah! He was full-blown with conceit of his overcomings, and thought he would win easily here also,' said Madoc sulkily

'Thine ears are not so sharp as mine, then, son Didst not hear him say, before they closed, that he thought he could not win? Yet he would go forward with the struggle.'

'I do not see how he can be other than a coward, to boast himself no warrior, and turn away from the honour I would do him'

''Tis certainly a strange lad,' mused Evrawc, and with this the two passed on

Bran spent the evening chatting with Arril, and

spinning yarns by the Guest-House fire to a crowd of young warriors all eager to hear news He sold two or three knives and daggers, and got orders for the mending of two spearheads, a cauldron, and some odds and ends that had come unriveted, not to mention putting new rims on an old chariot and a patch on a split buckler He went to bed well satisfied with his day

Next morning as he sat outside the Guest-House, surrounded by the things he was to mend, and hammering at Hao's cauldron, a man came up to him on quiet feet

'Art thou Bran the Bronze-smith?' he asked

Bran grinned and waved his hand at the scattered objects

'What thinkest thou?' he replied

'Then the King bade me say that he would speak with thee, now, in the Great Hall Nay, stay not to put thy tools away He said be swift'

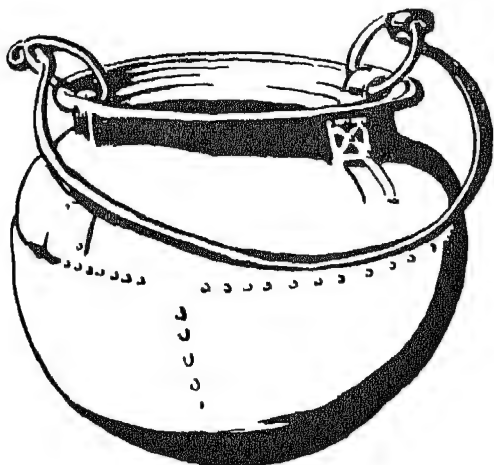
'I leave my work about for no man,' retorted Bran, rapidly stacking the things in a corner of the hut 'Now I am ready'

He followed the messenger through the Dun to where the King's Hall stood up higher than any of the other houses It was built of wood, and the door-posts were carved and painted The roof was of shingles The skin curtain hung over the doorway was wrought with a coloured pattern The messenger pushed it aside

'The smith, my lord,' he announced 'I bade him make all haste, but he would stay to put away his tools——'

'Enough,' came the voice of Evrawc from within 'He were no craftsman else. Let him enter.'

The man stood aside and Bran went in The hall, being of course unwindowed, looked dark inside, and the great pillars hewn from tree-trunks made it look larger than it actually was Along the walls were benches, shields, and weapons hung from wooden pegs, and there were long, heavy tables on which were strewn clay beakers and wooden platters The



King sat on a bench before the central hearthstone, and Bran, who seldom missed anything, noticed that at the further end of the hall was another hearth, doubtless for cooking

He came up to the King and knelt. Evrawc motioned him to sit on the floor, but it was some time before he said anything Bran sat quite still, waiting, and taking everything in

'Why art thou a wanderer, and so young?' demanded the King suddenly.

Bran told him briefly, wasting no words The King questioned him here and there as if to be sure that he told the truth, and then nodded as if satisfied

'And so thou wouldst not join my son's Warrior Band, that the young men for three days' journey round about strive with one another to enter,' was Evrawc's next remark

'Lord, I am a craftsman and a worker with my hands, and no warrior I would fight for my life, but not for fighting's sake Why should I?'

'Then thou wouldst not fight for me either?' Evrawc's blue eyes were hard

'I do not owe thee anything, lord,' said Bran

'Darest thou speak thus to me?' exclaimed the King, his hand on his sword-hilt

'I thought thou wouldst have a true answer, lord,' Bran said calmly

Evrawc laughed and relaxed

'And thou art right I wished to try thee. Nevertheless, if thou mightest serve me, and yet live the masterless life thou lovest, wouldst thou do so?'

'How might that be?' asked Bran cautiously

'Thou hearest much on thy wanderings, is it not? Men heed not greatly what they speak before a wandering smith, a masterless man, who owes naught to any lord'

'Ah,' said Bran understandingly.

'Now I—I have been a warrior in my youth, and loved the clash of swords and the smell of blood But it is folly, lad, folly I like now to see the yellow corn grow, and the strong children playing, and the fair young women with their babies at their breast I care not for slaughter, and burned villages, and women crying for their husbands Therefore I have

made peace in my land, and it hath grown fair and rich And some men love me ' He sighed

'It is good,' said Bran

Evrawc looked down at him under drawn brows 'Speakest thou this from thy heart? But I see thou dost Thou art very young to see this—for even myself I wonder if it is because I am growing old that I love not war Yes—yes Because my land is fair and rich, there are those who would take it from me Moreover, it is said that I grow weak and cowardly, and care not for glory any more. I think I shall not be suffered to end my days in peace, but that war will come soon, and I must fight to keep my own.'

'Is it Karko the Black?' asked Bran

'So thou hast heard Now, what if thou wert to go north of this Dun, with thy pack on thy back, and listen in the villages to what they say of Karko, and bring me word again? It may be thou canst gather the tale of his men and the strength of his Dun, and also who will hold for me and who for him '

'I will go to the Dun of Karko himself,' Bran said quietly.

'That will mean danger, for Karko will question thee concerning me '

'I can tell lies as well as another man,' laughed Bran 'Unless—thou fearest lest I should betray thee, King Evrawc '

'That I must take my chance of,' answered the King 'But a king learns, if he hath any wits, whom he should trust and whom he should not '

'I thank thee,' said Bran 'I will bring thee word of Karko's Dun, of its walls and fences, of his fighting men and their skill with chariot, sword, and spear For though I call no man master, yet I like thy wis-

dom, and would help thee if I can Yet, if by my means thou keepest thy land in peace, I think it will not please thy son, Prince Madoc.'

'Madoc will have his fill of war and glory' Evrawc smiled rather sadly 'If not while I live, then when I am dead But I think while I live Now, say no word of this our talk to any man Thou canst give out that I wished to buy a dagger of thee, and when thou comest again, let it be with the tale that thou hast weapons to show me'

'I will do so,' Bran agreed 'Farewell, O wise King.'

CHAPTER XVI

MORAN'S TREACHERY

Now of the adventures that Bran met with on his mission to the north, though they were many, this tale does not tell He was five months on his journey, for winter came upon him and storms held him snow-bound for weeks at a time at one place and another He reached the Dun of Karko the Black, and saw that ill-favoured chief himself Indeed, Karko bought a sword of him, and Bran, not liking the man, hoped fervently that it would split under the first blow He had some thought of sticking a knife into him, but remembered that if he did so he would certainly be caught and killed, which was not worth while. So, having lied cheerfully and with conviction about Evrawc's Dun, and taken particular note of Karko's stockade, the number of his warriors and their skill, he made his way south again and came in February to the Dun of Evrawc.

Arril was delighted to see him, hugged him fervently, and declared that he was broader than ever, which was true He welcomed him, and Shan Scarface offered to wrestle with him to see how he was progressing Bran was thrown again, but Shan said that he had put up a better fight than before After which Bran announced that he wanted to see the King

'He bought that dagger of me when I was here last,' he said, 'and I have here a very pretty palstave head, as neat a thing as ever I wrought, that should please him.'

Evrawc received him alone, as before, and Bran, squatting in front of the fire, told his adventures

'Karko hath not so strong a Dun as thine, lord,' he said, 'the stockade is less by two arm-lengths in height and one in thickness, and it hath a ditch but no water in it But the Dun is very cunningly set amongst the hills, and hard to come at His men are all strong, good archers and fierce warriors, and they number two tens of tens and five tens at the least. Nevertheless, he hath no men who sit the backs of horses as Arril hath taught thine to do.'

'That is as yet of little help,' said Evrawc. 'They are too unsure Didst learn anything of Karko's plans?'

'His men go throughout the villages between his land and thine, lord, bragging of him for a valiant warrior and casting scorn on thee for a stay-at-home and a peace-lover Many chiefs have sworn to follow him, some through greed, some through love of battle, some through the rede of their young men, and some through fear of their neighbours and Karko But I think that not a few of them might be won back to thee'

'And what thinkest thou of Karko himself? Is he a great chief?'

'He is a strong man of his hands and a brave warrior His men fear him and follow willingly. But I do not like him'

'And why not, wise-head?'

'Because he hath no care for the good craftsmen of his land, but treats them as slaves and honours warriors only Me he treated as though I had been an ox'

Evrawc laughed 'Truly he is a foolish chief who

despises his craftsmen. And now tell me of ways and distances'

Bran had made a rough map pricked on a skin, with marks and scratches to show distances and numbers, and he now brought this out and explained to the King how the tracks went, where they were steep and where rough, how many men could march abreast on them, where the chariots could go and where footmen only.

'Thou hast done well,' said Evrawc at last, and sat for some time with his chin on his hand, thinking

'And now,' he said presently, 'thou shalt have shelter here and food, and anything else that thou needest; for thou hast given me great help. It may be that I shall need thee again'

'I go south,' said Bran

'Ay? Well, I would fain know the minds of the South Folk also, how many will stand by me against Karko Go, therefore, and return with word in two moons'

'I cannot take less than three, if I am to see Amballo and learn how he does,' Bran protested

'Amballo? He who dwells on the moors? That is too far away.'

'Nay, but,' said Bran, 'it is very long since I saw the old man, he grows feeble, and he hath enemies about him I must go.'

'It is too far,' insisted Evrawc. 'I make ready for war swiftly, since war there must be And I would have thy news.'

'Then send another,' said Bran shortly, 'for to Amballo I must go'

'How if I forbid thee?'

'Thou art not my master, King Evrawc.'

'But thou art in my Dun. If I slay thee for insolence, thou wilt not see Amballo ever.'

'Neither wilt thou, O King, get thy news. Moreover, I could quite easily lie to thee, saying I will return in two moons, but returning never.'

Bran was on his feet, standing square and firm and meeting the King's angry blue eyes with cold grey ones. The two stared at each other for fully a minute, then in spite of himself Evrawc laughed.

'Thou stubborn young hound!' he said. 'Well, go thy ways. I doubt if I should have trusted thee so well hadst thou not proved faithful to Amballo. Go, go, and return as quickly as thou mayest. The gods know how many of us will be living when thou comest again.'

'I will make all speed,' said Bran, liking King Evrawc more than ever.

'Hold—wear this to keep thee in mind of me.'

Evrawc took from his arm a golden bracelet, the ends open and thickened to a trumpet shape, and set it above Bran's elbow.

'I do not need it to remind me, King,' smiled Bran. 'But I thank thee. And now farewell—may the gods guard thee!'

Arril was waiting for him outside the hall, and jumped up eagerly to question him how he had fared. The golden armlet he noticed at once.

'Why—why, Bran, what hast thou done that he should so honour thee?'

''Tis payment for a trifle of an axehead and a dagger that he liked. Ay, that palstave took his fancy, as I had hoped. Evrawc is an open-handed lord.'

'And thy work is good. Come, Bran, there is much I have to tell thee'

'Well,' said Bran, 'but I may not talk for long. I would sleep soon, for to-morrow at dawning I go south.'

'So soon! Thou hast but just come Put off thy going for another day or two for our friendship's sake'

'One more day then,' Bran agreed

'Nay, three more days at the least'

'Look 'ee,' said Bran 'It was the Moon of Winds when last I saw Amballo; and now the winter is overpast again, and the Moon of Floods is come I must go to him with all speed'

'And leave me?' pouted Arril

'Thou art in the midst of friends, and thou art young Amballo is old and lonely, and Moran means him ill. I must know how he fares Hast any message to him?'

'Oh, give him my greeting. But, Bran, what difference can a day or so make?'

'I do not know But I feel that I must go, and quickly Yet my heart is sore at leaving thee, my Arril'

'I don't believe it,' stormed Arril. 'I think thou hast a cold stone instead of a heart, Bran'

'I do not know what thou hast, that carest not for the good old Amballo that was a father to thee.'

'Oh, take not up that old song again, Bran! And if thou wilt not stay to please me, I care not when thou goest Thou canst go at once if it please thee'

'Then I will go, as I purposed, to-morrow'

'Do, thou cold-heart!' Arril flounced away in high dudgeon, and Bran made his way sadly to the

Guest-House It was soon known throughout Evrawc's Dun that the touchy young favourite of Prince Madoc had parted with his friend the Bronze-smith in anger, and for the most part sympathy was with Bran Curiously enough, it proved most fortunate for the boys that this quarrel had taken place

So the next morning at dawn Bran set his face to go southward It was a cold grey morning, blowing gustily and driving sleet against his face, but he was too hard and strong to care much He pressed against it valiantly, and made good speed Presently, however, he found the floods out, and had to make a wide circuit to avoid them Then the weather changed to a blizzard such as it would have been madness to try to walk through, and he had to dig himself into a hillside for three days It was a lean and hungry Bran that emerged, seeking food, when the storm had blown over But everything was frozen hard, all living things had sought shelter, and it was another three days before he staggered, famished and nearly exhausted, up to a little village in the shelter of the hills

Fortunately he was known here, and the villagers took him in and tended him, though they thought he would die on their hands It took him a day or two to get over this experience, which indeed would have killed any one less robust Then he pushed on once more, and the weather being kind to him, he had better faring for the next thirty miles. Then he struck floods again It was a bad time of year for travelling.

What with one thing and another, it was more than a month before he mounted the familiar grey-brown moors and made his way towards the village of the Moor Folk. He did not go there directly,

however, for he had an idea that he would like to visit the mines and quarries further west and bargain for some ores himself He did not think he would be recognized, and cared little if he were He was no child now, but nearly seventeen, as big as a man, and stronger than most

He knew these moors so well that he could have walked them blindfold He jogged along steadily, noticing everything as he went without paying attention to it, just as you notice the things in your room without knowing it, and are brought up short by anything different The difference that checked Bran, bringing him to a sudden halt, was footmarks going off at an angle to the trail, round behind a hill that was a rough jumble of heather and boulders Not that this was worth considering, but, a little way from the track was the broken tip of a miner's pick

'There were no mines just here,' reflected Bran 'Maybe they have opened up a new one. I must go and see '

He turned aside and followed up the plainly marked trail, which two or three men must have trodden a day or perhaps two days earlier. There were broken heather stems, prints in the moist black earth, and rocks from which the lichen had been scratched .Whatever the men had been after, they had come back, for he could see the returning footmarks overlying those going out

The trail led on into the hills for several hundred yards, and Bran was following up mechanically when he came to a full-stop for the second time It was a sound that checked him now—a weak, pitiful sound—a groan There it was again—the gasp of a man far gone in pain and exhaustion

Somebody hurt! Now, had one of the party had an accident and the rest gone for help? But their trail was a day old and they should be back by now. Perhaps there had been a quarrel. Anyway, Bran was bound to find out all about it.

He pressed forward rapidly, came round the corner of a big rock, and saw a man lying face downward in the heather. An old man, with hair that would have been nearly white if it had not been stained with blood. A thin, small man, who seemed to have dragged himself as far as he could in spite of the broken leg that lay at a twisted angle.

Bran let his pack slip from his shoulders, ran down the slope and put a careful arm under the man's breast, lifting and turning him. The poor grey face tilted back.

'Amballo!' cried Bran.

There was no answer. The lean old body was very cold, and a deep wound in the head showed that much blood had been lost. Bran held his old master close to his warm, broad breast, and tried by patting and rubbing to get the blood moving again in the chilled veins. Presently Amballo groaned again, his blue eyelids flickered, and his fingers twitched.

Bran laid him down carefully, tore off his bearskin cloak and laid it over Amballo, and then stood up to look for water. Streams are rarely far away on the moors, in fact there was one not ten yards off, and Bran soon had his leather wallet full and was slipping drops between the pale lips. Having dabbed away the blood from the wounded head, he bandaged it with a strip of his tunic. Then he turned his attention to the broken leg.

The dreadful pain as Bran pulled the bone into

position roused Amballo from his stupor. He cried out wildly and tried to raise himself

'Steady,' said Bran, busy with a splint of heather stems. 'A little more and it will be over Courage, Amballo'

'Who is it?' muttered the old man. 'Not Moran —not Semo——'

'It is Bran' The boy pulled a bandage tight, fastened it, and came and took Amballo's head and shoulders on his knee He had nearly stripped himself naked to make bandages.

'Bran—Bran—Bran—why, of course, it is Bran. Where hast thou been so long?'

'No matter now,' said Bran. 'Tell me how thou camest to be here, hurt and alone?'

'It was Moran,' Amballo whispered 'They came to me at my forge, and told me of new copper ore that they had found, very rich. Moran and Semo They bid me come see it. Had it been Moran only I would have suspected, but Semo hath been my friend So I went with them Then Moran struck me, on the head, so that I fell from a rock and my leg broke. When I woke they were gone I think they thought me dead Two nights I lay here I waited only for death'

'Thou shalt live now,' said Bran, his eyes blazing with a hard anger 'I have a little food with me When thou hast eaten and art a little stronger, I will bring thee—I think to Arandi's village It is not more than a morning's journey. And when Arandi hath heard thy tale, we will go to thy village, and— I think Moran will be sorry for a little while.'

He fetched bread from his pack, soaked it in water to soften it, and fed Amballo in little sippets. The

old man found it hard to swallow, but having made the effort felt stronger Leaving him tucked up in the bearskin cloak, Bran hid his pack away under a boulder His bow and quiver he would not be parted from, but he could not carry his spear and Amballo too.

When his preparations were complete, he came to Amballo and knelt beside him

'Now, Amballo,' he said, 'it will hurt, but it is the best that we can do '

'Thou canst not carry me so far,' protested Amballo

'I will try at least,' said Bran, squaring his shoulders With difficulty he got the old man swung across his back and shoulder, for the leg in its splint made it impossible for Amballo to stride Bran's hips in the usual way, and so the ten-mile march began

It was a hard journey for both of them Amballo suffered horribly, so much so that more than once he swooned away into merciful unconsciousness As for Bran, light as Amballo was, and broad as was his own back, it ached to desperation before he had covered two-thirds of the way He varied matters by carrying Amballo for short stretches in his arms, which was easier for the old man, but made Bran's shoulders feel as though they were out of joint. He was ashamed of feeling so tired, and a little taken down in pride of strength Nevertheless, few men could have done what he did

But it was a very erect youth, despite fatigue, who stalked into Arandi's village with head held high and grey eyes ablaze, carrying in his arms the nearly unconscious Amballo He stood at the gates and

shouted, in a voice that brought out all the village, staring and whispering.

'Ho, ye men of the moor! What do ye while your Master Smith, your chief craftsman, lies all but murdered on the moor?'

The whispering swelled into cries, mutterings, exclamations. The Headman Arandi pushed his way through the crowd.

'What is this?' he demanded. 'Who art thou, and what hast thou there?'

'Look!' answered Bran.

Arandi looked into the face of Amballo.

'Is he dead?' he asked in a whisper.

'Not dead, thanks to the gods who love him, and who guided me to him in time. But let me bring him into shelter, and then ye shall hear all.'

'Make way!' thundered Arandi, and the crowd opened a lane through which Bran strode, using the last ounce of his strength to keep his head well up and clasp Amballo firmly in his arms.

No one noticed a man who slipped away in the gathering dusk, out of the gate and along by the wall, stooping, creeping along as if he feared to be seen.

Arandi led the way to his own hut, and there Bran laid Amballo on skins before a bright fire, and Arandi's wife came forward to tend the injured man. But having laid down his burden, it was more than Bran could do to get to his feet again. The hut grew very large, its walls faded away, he felt as if a weight were pressing on his shoulders, bowing him down and down, until his head was on the floor and he collapsed in a heap.

'Poor lad, he hath paid out all his strength,' he heard Arandi say, and the voice seemed to come from

very far off. The two men lifted him up, supported him to the other side of the fire, and brought mead and poured it between his lips Bran tried to speak, but his voice would not come

'Rub his arms and chest,' Arandi commanded 'Fetch that oil there, quickly He must tell us more, so that we know what to do'

So they rubbed and kneaded his cramped muscles, and every now and then dropped warm mead between his lips, until the life began to come back into his exhausted body

He tried to raise himself One of the men slipped his shoulder under him to make a support, while Arandi knelt opposite with stern questioning eyes

'It was Moran,' Bran said, his voice getting stronger as he went on 'Moran always hated Amballo He and another—a friend who would see him in Amballo's place—led the old man out on to the moor, on some story of new-found copper. They took care that none knew where he was And there they struck him, and left him for dead, and doubtless they are now searching for him with bewailing!'

'All this is true,' came Amballo's voice feebly He had come to himself in the warmth of the fire, and the strengthening of the hot soup with which Arandi's wife was feeding him

'Where didst thou find him, and when?' Arandi asked

'By Wild-cat Tor, off the northern trail that goes by Tall Stones, just after midday,' answered Bran

'That cannot be true!' declared one of the men 'Thou couldst not have borne him so far in that time'

'Ask Amballo Maybe I dreamed it' Bran was beginning to feel better.

'It is indeed true,' confirmed Amballo. 'I remember that the sun stood at midday, and I was waiting for death Then in a little—but I think my senses had left me—I found my head on this lad's breast And after he had covered me with his cloak, and torn his tunic to bind my head and leg, he bore me on his back and in his arms—and if he have not killed himself it is a wonder'

'It is well with me,' Bran reassured him 'And oh,' he went on, sitting up straight, 'we must not linger! Summon thy men, Arandi, bring torches and swords, and march we over the moor to take Moran! Quick, before word gets to him that Amballo lives!'

But Arandi was a little put out by Bran's commanding tone 'There is no need for such haste,' he said 'How should word get to Moran before morning? We cannot cross the moor by dark, with the wolves about. Moreover, we must have the lad with us to tell his tale, and as yet he cannot walk'

'Yet take Moran! Hold him! And I will follow as soon as I may. Do not let him escape!' urged Bran, trying to get up

'Peace, peace!' said Arandi 'Rest thee, boy Thou hast done nobly But matters are in my care now, and I will order them Do thou sleep'

CHAPTER XVII

FAREWELL TO THE MOORS

THERE was nothing for it but to give in, and indeed Bran was too utterly spent to do any more He drifted off into a profound and dreamless sleep that lasted until daybreak

Arandi roused him then, and Bran opened his eyes to see the hut full of men armed with swords and spears, and the day breaking grey beyond the curtain

'Canst thou walk now, lad?' whispered the Headman softly, not to awaken Amballo, 'or shall we carry thee?'

'Nay, I can walk' Bran got stiffly on to his feet, shook himself gently, and carefully stretched his aching arms 'Wow!' he said, with a wry face, 'I think every bone of me is made of pain But it will do me good to walk'

One of the men handed him a piece of cloth in place of his torn tunic, and another threw a cloak over his shoulders

'Come, then,' said Arandi, and Bran staggered after him out of the hut

The cold morning air revived him somewhat, and after a mile or so of walking the stiffness began to loosen up He was striding firmly enough, though his back and shoulders still pained him, when the party drew near to the village of the Moor Men.

Bran had a queer feeling as he looked at the roofs

he had not seen for nearly four years, and remembered how he had first come there with Arril. The place was just the same—the women going about their morning work, the men lounging in doorways, mending axes and spears and patching sandals, children playing hither and thither, a couple of kids butting each other, a mother dog rolling with her puppies in the sun. Everybody stopped and stared open-mouthed as the determined little band came marching in at the gate, and more than one pointed at Bran's tawny head and whispered. They all looked rather frightened, for you must remember they thought him dead, and here he was, or someone very like him only much larger They could not make it out.

'I seek for Moran the Bronze-smith,' cried Arandi

Evain, a little greyer, but quiet and sensible as ever, made answer

'Moran the Headman is at his forge'

'Moran the Headman? Where then is Amballo?' The cunning Arandi was fishing for information

'Amballo the Master Smith, beloved of Diwa, hath gone to the Land of the Blessed Three days since he went down to his smithy and came not again We have sought him high and low, but found no trace Surely Diwa hath taken him home'

'Ho,' said Arandi 'So that's the tale, is it? Stand forth, thou Bran, and say what thou didst find'

'Bran! Bran! Bran!' the amazed murmur ran through the crowd

'Go down first to the forge and make sure that Moran is there,' urged Bran 'Let him not escape'

But Arandi liked everything to be done in an

orderly manner, and he wanted the villagers to hear the charge against Moran before he proceeded to arrest him

So Bran, wasting no more time, stepped out, and standing with folded arms told his tale.

'Amballo the Master Smith is at Arandi's village,' he cried in a loud voice 'Two days the old man lay upon the moor, bleeding from the cut in the head that Moran gave him, his leg broken with his fall That is what Moran did to your Headman, that he might have his place as your chief, and honour as Master Smith'

'If this be true——' Evain began, and an angry snarl started among the villagers

'Assuredly it is true,' Arandi confirmed. 'Yesterday at even Bran here brought him in half dead'

'Think of it,' Bran broke out again, his cold anger, slow to rise but very deadly, showing itself now and gathering as he went on 'The poor old man alone and suffering, cast out to die in the cold, bleeding and broken! He who made your village great, he who was the Master of his craft, he who was the last of the Sea-Rangers, to whose fathers Diwa the God-smith taught the working of bronze! What shall be done to those who sought to slay him? I say, what shall be done?'

A savage yell broke from the Moor Men 'Death! Death! Death!' they shouted, and Arandi cried

'Let us go down and take the killer in his smithy!'

Like an avenging torrent they swept out of the village, brandishing knives, axes, swords — any weapon they first laid hands on Bran, stiff still with yesterday's effort, fell into the rear Down the hill rushed the mob, leaping from stone to stone,

some falling, some dropping out to pant for breath, but the most of them dashing on and on They crashed into the wood, trampling down the undergrowth on each side of the trail. Each wished to be the first, to have the slaying of the traitor.

'Oh, fools!' said Bran to anybody who cared to listen. 'Make a noise like a spring flood and tell him he is sought for, ay, do?'

He heard the roar of the crowd as it burst into the clearing about Moran's workshop, yells and curses and tramplings Then the noise gradually died away, the voices ceased one by one, and when Bran came up there was only an angry, discomfited muttering, and folk staring at one another with blank faces

'What is it?' demanded Bran, shouldering his way unceremoniously to the front

'He is not here!' declared Arandi 'He hath not been here this morning. See, there is a spider web with frost on it across the door!'

'Can he have had warning?' questioned Bran

'I do not see how that could be,' Evain was beginning, when a boy in the crowd piped up suddenly.

'Late last night I saw one come through the gateway and go towards Moran's hut'

'Who watched the gate last night?' said Evain 'Thou, Paen, was it not? Did any come through late?'

'Why, yes' Paen scratched his head 'Mawg of Arandi's village He hath been often here, and he told me that he was belated hunting.'

'And when went Moran forth?'

'Not long after. I remember it was not yet day

He said to me that he was restless and could not sleep, and would go work at the forge to tire himself Semo was with him '

'Then they have escaped!' exclaimed Arandi 'Oh, wicked one! Hater of the gods! Cross-eyed son of a weasel! And now he hath the start of us by many hours, and we shall never catch him.'

Bran thought to himself that, had they taken his advice and started during the night, they might have been successful. But one of the first things he had learned in his hard life was that one need not say all that one thinks, and he held his tongue.

'Well,' said wise-minded Evain, 'he hath given us the slip, but nevertheless we are well rid of him. Let us not shout after quarry gone to earth Now my rede is that we all return and give food to Arandi and his men, and then return with him to fetch Amballo the Headman home '

There did not seem anything else to do The crowd, after a little more blustering and bragging about what they would do if they caught Moran and Semo, returned rather crestfallen to the village Bran said no word at all, but his anger burned in him like a steady fire. He turned over in his mind all the possibilities, and reflected that it was not likely that Moran knew of his being alive, since Mawg had not known him Moran, a fugitive from his home, would probably take to Bran's own trade, wandering to and fro mending and making, therefore, Bran reckoned, it was fairly certain that they would meet again And then — Bran's muscular hands clenched themselves—then Moran would get the punishment he deserved

The meal took rather a long time, for everybody's

story had to be told several times over. Many people had to tell how they had always known that Moran meant mischief, and would do a harm to Amballo one day. If that was so, why on earth had they not done something about it? Bran thought wearily. Then Bran himself had to be questioned, and he told the tale of his fight with Garm in the wood and his wanderings all these years.

'So after all it was not Garm that slew thee, but thou Garm!' Evain laughed. 'And Amballo came storming home that day, swearing that Garm had stuck a knife in thee, and that he had slain Garm in revenge. Paid Moran full tale, too, for his slave! And there wast thou roaming up and down the land alive and well, thou sly young cock—and by the look of thee thou hast thriven on it! But now'—his face took on an anxious expression—'what wilt thou do?'

It was Bran's turn to laugh. 'Fear not, Evain,' he said. 'I shall not stay to wake old quarrels again. When I have seen Amballo safely here, I shall go back to King Evrawc, who hath need of me.'

'Ho, ho!' said Arandi. 'He hath grown a great man. Kings have need of him!'

'Is this the red-headed cub that Amballo brought in, nigh seven years ago?' chuckled Evain. 'He's a Master Smith himself now, and a friend of kings, and hath saved the Headman's life! We must look to it, or he will be king over all of us.'

Bran shook his head, smiling, and said gently: 'But I am still just Bran the fatherless, who hath no home nor people. And I thank ye all who have been good to me.'

Seeing that he was not disposed to brag, and that there was no need to be jealous of him as he was

going away, the young men began to make much of him. They praised his stout limbs, and would have had him join in sports with them, but Bran, who knew that it would take little to raise trouble again, was glad enough to plead his stiffness as an excuse for refusing. He was relieved when Arandi and Evain at last rose up, and talked about going to fetch Amballo.

A litter was made of skins stretched on poles, and four lusty youths told off to carry it. Bran smiled to himself. The whole village wanted to come and escort their rescued Headman, but Evain wisely forbade this. He guessed that Amballo would not wish for noise. Only two or three of the elders were allowed to come with Arandi.

It was late in the afternoon when they got to Arandi's village, and they were met by a disappointment. Arandi's wife came out of the hut with finger on lip, saying that Amballo was in a high fever, delirious and raving, and certainly could not be moved.

The escort promptly set down the litter and went off to tell the morning's adventure to the rest of the folk. Bran, Arandi, and the elders went into the hut. Amballo did not know them, though his eyes were wide open and very bright. He was breathing with difficulty, every breath rattling and wheezing out of his poor old lungs, his face flushed and his lips muttering continually. Occasionally he cried out in a high-pitched voice. The long lying out in the cold had been too much for him.

Arandi's wife shooed out her husband and his companions as if they had been intrusive goats. But Bran sat down by his old master and refused to

budge, and seeing that his presence seemed to quiet the old man a little, the nurse gave in to his remaining.

The fever did not go down that day, nor the next, nor for many days. The delirium alternated with fits of stupor, and the breathing grew worse and worse. Arandi's wife shook her head. Amballo was too old, she said. He had been left untended too long. He was dying.

Bran was with him most of the time. Sometimes Amballo seemed to recognize the boy, and would try to speak to him. Certainly it helped his struggling breath to be lifted up by a pair of strong arms and held against a broad shoulder.

There was little skill in nursing in those days, and no such thing as a doctor. The local priest, of course, came and did incantations, made a sacrifice, and declared that the omens were unlucky. Having thus settled that Amballo would certainly die, he retired and left him in peace, probably the best thing he could have done. The hut was alternately draughty and stuffy, smoke got into one's lungs and did not improve chances of throwing off pneumonia. Amballo grew weaker and weaker.

Then one evening, when Bran was alone with him in the hut, the old man came out of a heavy stupor and opened his eyes, and there was understanding in them.

'Bran,' he whispered very feebly.

'My father,' said Bran softly.

'Lift—me,' Amballo panted, and Bran raised him very carefully. The old body was nothing but skin and bone, the arms looked pitifully lean and withered against the boy's big round ones.

'I go—forth this night—to the home of my fathers,' Amballo said 'Bran—I die'

'No, no,' cried Bran 'See, thou art better. I will bring thee some soup——'

'I know that I die,' Amballo insisted 'My strength is all slipping away'

'Then the priest spake not true!' Bran exclaimed angrily 'He said that I should bring thee luck'

'And hast thou not? It is better that I should die here, in thine arms, my son, and be laid to rest duly in my howe, with the prayers of the priest to guide me and food at my side for my journey, than that I should have lain unburied and alone, and my spirit wandered homeless on the moors'

It is difficult for us to understand how tremendously important it appeared to men of old that they should be buried properly To them, on the correct rites, and the putting of food and weapons in the grave, it depended whether they would reach the Land of Blessed Spirits safe and well equipped

'My son,' Amballo went on after a pause, 'see thou that my tools are buried with me A Master Smith have I been, and surely Diwa will take me into the smithy, where he forges weapons for the gods, when I go to him.'

'It shall be done,' promised Bran.

'If thou seest Arril—tell him—I always loved him—may good luck go with him——'

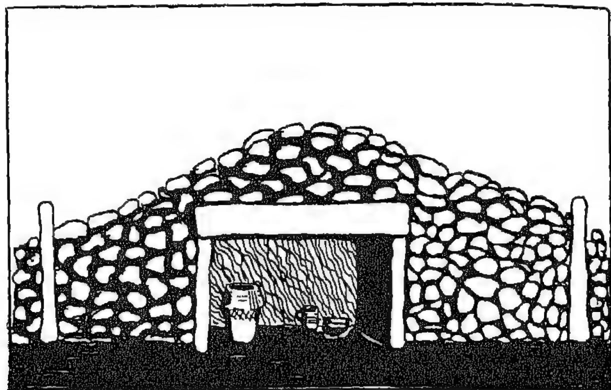
The voice was getting very weak now

'Bran—thou faithful one—I bless thee too The priest—said rightly—thou hast been my luck Thou also—shalt be lucky—Bran—my son——'

He could not say any more Bran sat holding him while the breaths grew slower and slower, and at

last stopped on a gasp The brave old spirit had gone to join its fathers

Then they buried the old Headman according to the rites of his people. They made a stone chamber on the hillside, setting up four slabs of stone in a square Then on a flat stone they built a fire, and



The Headman's Tomb

laid the body of Amballo on it, until it was burned to ashes They collected the ashes and charred bones in a great urn and set it within the cist Round it they placed some tools, his bronze torque, and the whetstone with which he gave the final sharpening to the weapons which he forged They left food in a pot, and then closed the cist with the flat stone on which the body had been burned, and piled above it earth and stones, while the priest prayed aloud and the women wailed After which they returned to the village and held a funeral feast such as befitted the funeral of a chief and a Master Smith.

Bran stayed until the feast was over To have left before would have been to show disrespect to the dead Headman But when the dancing was done, the last cake eaten, and the last song sung, and the men of the other villages had gone home, Bran came quietly into Evain's hut, his bow and quiver slung over his shoulder

'I go now,' he said 'May the gods look favourably upon thy people!'

Evain, Headman now that Amballo was dead and Moran disgraced, looked kindly at the boy

'Art sure thou wilt not stay with us?' he asked 'The past is past The folk have no more hatred of thee, for thou hast borne thyself modestly and wisely Thou hast a strong arm and a merry tongue, and we could do with such Stay with us.'

Bran shook his head 'Nay,' he said, 'though all is well between us now, the young men would soon remember that I am an Outlander It is better that I go away'

'Perhaps thou art right,' admitted Evain 'Go then, and the favour of the gods go with thee'

So Bran went forth from the village of the Moor Folk, and he never saw it again

CHAPTER XVIII

NEWS OF BATTLE

THE three months of which he had spoken were nearly at an end when Bran once more entered the land which owned Evrawc's overlordship. He had heard troubling rumours as he came near its borders—rumours that said all sorts of things, contradicted each other flatly, but showed that certainly in his absence things had been happening At one village he was told that Black Karko had come out of the north with an army numbering tens of tens of tens, had descended upon Evrawc's Dun, and put every man, woman, and child to the sword. Then again he heard that it was Karko's Dun which had been so destroyed At another place they said there had been a great battle and Karko was killed, and at yet another that Karko was laying waste the fields round about Evrawc's Dun, and that the King himself lay sheltered there and dared not come out.

Bran, feeling rather anxious, pushed on as quickly as he could. Here to the south there were no signs of ravage, the ploughed fields showed the untrampled green of young corn and the hamlets stood securely thatched, each in its stockade But he found that from many the fighting men had gone to join the King, and the work was being done by women, boys, and old men, and the last village before the Dun was empty No cattle lowed as he approached, nor dogs barked, nor sheep nor goats browsed on the hills. There was no singing of women at loom or mill, or

laughter of children or deep voices of men Every one had gone, carrying their household goods with them, to take refuge in the fort, and by that Bran judged that Karko must be fairly close. He was more eager than ever to learn what had actually happened.

On the well-marked trail, whose muddy way was trampled by the feet of men, women, children, oxen, goats, pigs, dogs, and the wheels of wagons, his strong, tireless stride brought him up with a little group that had fallen behind Old men and women, tottering under their burdens, and mothers with tiny children in their arms or staggering by their side

'What hath happened?' asked Bran as he reached the pathetic band 'Give me that babe, mother—he 'll be lighter in my arms than thine And set that pack atop of mine, grandsire So. Is Karko the Black in the land?'

'Nearly two moons ago,' quavered the old man Bran had relieved, 'Prince Madoc went northward with his Warrior Band, to rouse this Karko out of his lair and slay him We had no word for fifteen days, and then a runner brought news that the Prince had indeed attacked Karko's Dun and set fire to it, and slain all those within So we thought all was well, and awaited the Prince's return in triumph But it was not Madoc who came—it was Karko himself, burning and ravaging! For he and his warriors had withdrawn from the Dun and were in hiding in the forest when Prince Madoc came, and it was but an empty nest he pulled down! So now went forth Evrawc the King, with the other warriors, but Karko would not meet them He marched hither and thither, and death marked his steps and the ravens followed him, till the King feared lest he should fall

upon our Dun and destroy it as Madoc had done his. So now King Evrawc and his warriors guard the Dun, and all we gather into it, for who can tell where Karko will come next?'

'But what of Prince Madoc? Hath naught been heard of him?' asked Bran anxiously. For where Madoc was, there would Arril be also.

'Naught. We do not know where he is nor what he is doing. Surely he will come south again to help his father, but I suppose that either he can spare no messengers, or they have fallen into Karko's hands.'

Bran longed to reach Evrawc's Dun and get surer news, but he could not leave this pitiful little band. So he suited his pace to theirs, and helped first one and then another with their burdens and their babies, so that by the time they drew up to the gates of the Dun at last he was very weary.

The last of the light was fading, but great watch-fires burned on every side of the stockade, with warriors standing beside them, spear in hand. Each man had a curved trumpet slung from his neck, so that he could give the alarm to those within the instant a foe approached. There were guards at the gateway too, and their faces were weary and anxious, though they smiled as the funny little procession came up.

'Whence are ye?' demanded the one who seemed to be captain.

'From Tod's Hamlet,' answered the foremost woman.

'Tod's Hamlet? Why, the rest of your folk reached here yesterday's noon!'

'Small thanks to them that we are here at all,' said the woman scornfully. 'But for this strong youth

here we should have lain out this night, and likely have left naught but our bones after the wolves had done with them, for we are too weary to watch or fight.'

'Why, it's the smith!' exclaimed the guard, peering at Bran. 'The King hath asked for thee many times this moon.'

'What is it? Hath news come?' sounded a strong voice behind, and the guards started and raised hands in salute as Evrawc the King stepped into the firelight.

'No one, lord, save the stragglers from Tod's Hamlet, and Bran the smith.'

'Bran at last!' said the King, and his voice was very tired. 'Where hast thou been so long?'

'Laying Amballo in his tomb, lord,' answered Bran, handing a sleeping two-year-old to his mother and removing a bundle from the top of his pack. 'I made all speed I could to come to thee.'

'Thou hast heard what hath been doing these three moons, then?'

'I have heard some things, my lord, as I passed through the villages. I know that Karko is in the land, and that Prince Madoc is ye know not where.'

'And why, being no warrior, didst thou come into a land troubled by war?' The King's question sounded a little bitter.

'To get news of Arril, my friend,' said Bran.

'Thou hast risked thy life to get news of him?'

'Why not?' said Bran.

'Thou cool queer lad! And now thou art here, thou wouldst fight for thy life if need be?'

'Surely.'

'Well, that we shall very likely see.'

Bran's companions had moved off, seeking the others from their village. The King laid his hand

on the boy's shoulder, and turned away from the gate, drawing him by his side. They paced slowly along the main way, while Bran told briefly the manner of Amballo's death. Evrawc hardly listened. It was plain that his own affairs pressed heavily on his mind.

They had to pick their way in and out of groups, sometimes huddled in shadow, sometimes lit by the flare of a torch or the flicker of a little fire. Every house in the Dun was full to overflowing; in the spaces between them awnings had been rigged up, and beneath them folk lay asleep in heaps. The night was noisy with lowings, bleatings, barkings, squealings, with bursts of talk and crying of restless children, for every village for miles around had emptied its folk into the shelter of the fort.

Bran looked about him carelessly. He did not know most of the refugees, but he recognized one or two and nodded to them. Then suddenly, as a woman cast some sticks upon a fire so that it flared up, the light fell on a face he knew well, though it was four years since he had seen it. Moran!

He stood stock-still, stiffening all over, and his hand flew to the knife at his belt. He was, in his usual common-sense way, measuring the distance between himself and the slayer of Amballo, and calculating whether he could walk up quietly through the huddled crowd and stab Moran, before any one could interfere, when the King's hand fell again on his shoulder.

'What is it, Bran?' asked the watchful Evrawc.

'Lord,' answered Bran, and though he was thrilling with anger he spoke as coolly as though he were naming the price of a sword, 'yonder is Moran, who slew Amballo. I will go and kill him.'

The hand on Bran's shoulder tightened. 'Nay,' said Evrawc, 'thou shalt not kill him yet I have need of him'

'He is utterly false, and will do thee a mischief if it suits him,' Bran protested 'He hath no heart, and I think no fear of the gods It were safer to kill him at once'

'All the same,' returned Evrawc firmly, 'I have need of all smiths at this time, and he is a skilful worker of bronze He came in six days ago, and I have seen his work. Afterwards, when we are clear of Karko, thou shalt do as thou wilt But for this time leave him alive'

'I would not trust him,' insisted Bran

'I have spoken,' said the King rather sternly 'Give me thy word, Bran, that thou wilt not touch him.'

'I promise, then,' said Bran reluctantly.

'Keep clear of him, lest thou grow angry and strike,' advised the King

Bran smiled calmly

'I never strike unless I mean to,' he said

'Then keep clear of him lest he strike at thee'

'I do not think he would know me He thinks me dead For all that, thou art right, lord I will see as little of him as may be.'

'And now come talk with me,' said Evrawc 'For though thou comest late, I would know all that thou canst tell me'

It was very late when Bran came from the hall of the King. The Guest-House, of course, was full up, and though Hao would have turned someone out to make room for Bran, he would not allow this He found a corner under a wall, rolled himself in his cloak and went to sleep as he always did, neither

hard ground, cold winds, nor noises making any difference to him.

The next day was rather depressing. People were crowded on top of one another, and getting sick of each other's company. True, all the young men were sent without the walls, by order of Evrawc, to exercise, and some of the women ventured out to watch them. But there was always the feeling that Black Karko might appear at any moment, from any quarter, and the games were half-hearted. The best warriors were for the most part in Prince Madoc's band, and though Evrawc's grizzled old veterans tried to put on an air of cheerfulness, it was not much believed in.

Bran was very worried also, longing desperately to know what had become of Arril. However, he joined in the games as merrily as he could, made a fool of himself running, did pretty well with the bow, and excellently at wrestling. After which, when the folk went within the gates towards evening, he gathered a group about him and spun his best yarns to take their minds off the waiting.

The next two days passed like the first. On the third day Bran was in the middle of a tale when a commotion at the gate made every one look up. A cry rose, swelled and was passed along till those in the furthest corner of the Dun heard it and crowded to know more.

'A runner! A runner! A runner! News—news—news!'

A long slim youth, dusty and pale and breathing hard, staggered through the press towards the door of Evrawc's hall. The King, brought out by the noise, stood in the doorway holding on to the carved

post so hard that his knuckles shone out white Otherwise he was quite calm, and showed no sign of the fearful anxiety he must have felt

The runner reeled to the King's feet and knelt At first his panting shook him so that he could not speak, then he gasped, so faintly that only those near him heard the words

'Victory! Karko is slain!'

The bystanders took it up and shouted it, so that it rolled like thunder over the Dun

'Victory! Victory! Victory! Karko the Black is slain!'

When the noise died down the runner had recovered himself a little, and went on in a louder voice

'Prince Madoc caught him in a valley between the hills He set archers upon the slopes among the rocks, and he himself waited with the chariots round the bend And he sent a little company of stout swordsmen to block the other end of the valley after Karko had entered, lest he should try to retreat He was caught on all sides, was Karko And though he had the more warriors, our arrows fell on him like rain, the chariot of the Prince was like the chariot of Darrar the Thunder-god! Karko could not run, he was forced to stand, and he lies buried under the heaps of his slain men'

'Yes, yes,' said Evrawc, uneasily, for the messenger was speaking hurriedly, as though to put off something that he had yet to tell 'And of our men—how many were slain?'

'Three tens and seven, lord,' answered the man reluctantly 'It was a fierce battle The trapped wolves fought well'

'And Madoc the Prince?' the King asked at last.

The runner did not answer. He bowed his head and looked sideways.

'Speak!' commanded Evrawc, his voice very deep, his hands clutching even harder at the doorpost.

'The gods—have taken—their loved one,' the messenger brought out as if each word hurt him. 'Prince Madoc fell—beneath the sword of Karko.'

Again the crowd took up the words and sent them echoing dolorously across the Dun.

'The Prince is dead! The Prince is dead! Prince Madoc is slain!'

King Evrawc was as white as death. 'He fought with Karko—he, boy that he was, must needs join in fight with great Karko the Black! Ah, why did he not trust to his arrows and keep aloof?' Then the father pulled himself together, and became the King again. He raised his head proudly.

'My son died bravely,' he said. 'He and his warriors have saved the land. Let us give thanks to the gods. And thou,' he added to the runner, 'thou art spent. Go rest thee—some of you have a care of him, and give him food and drink. And none of ye come near me for a space.'

He swung on his heel, pushed aside the skin curtain and entered his lonely hall.

The messenger rose to his feet, swaying dizzily. A dozen arms were stretched out to give him support, but it was Bran who reached him first. Setting his left arm about the runner's waist, he drew the other's right over his shoulder and so supported him towards the Guest-House.

'Tell me,' he whispered urgently as they went,

'what of Arril, Prince Madoc's charioteer? Lives he?'

The runner turned dazed eyes, that hardly saw, upon his questioner.

'The charioteer?' he said 'I know not—how should I know what happened to the charioteer when Madoc the Prince is dead?'

CHAPTER XIX

ESCAPE BY NIGHT

NEXT day, a little before noon, the sad little company that brought back the body of Prince Madoc entered the gates of Evrawc's Dun. First came a group of warriors, blowing dolorously upon their trumpets. After them four men carried on their shoulders a litter of boughs on which, covered by a cloak but with his face bare, lay the dead Prince. Very still and white and beautiful he lay, with his golden hair falling upon the litter and fluttering in the wind as though it, and it alone of all of him, were still alive. A groan broke from the crowding people as they looked on the quiet face.

After the litter came the empty chariot, drawn by one horse only, for the other was dead. And beside the chariot, swaying with weakness, his head bound in a piece of cloth all bloody, walked Arril, and Bran's heart gave a great leap of joy. His friend had come back alive.

Last came more warriors, most of them wounded, all of them dusty and weary. The procession passed on up to the King's Hall, where Evrawc stood white-faced but brave, waiting for his son. The litter was carried within. Arril, seeming not to know what he did, led the chariot up to the very door, and then stood uncertain. The reins dropped from his hands, he spread his arms abroad—and Bran, shouldering his way through the crowd, was just in time to catch him as he fell.

'Carry him into my house—the one next the

King's,' said a man, as Bran stood with his friend in his arms 'I 'll give thee a corner, and we 'll screen it with a skin The Prince's charioteer deserves that much'

Bran could not expect anything better, so he carried Arril into the house which stood next to Evrawc's He took command as though the place belonged to him, made the women fetch rugs to make a bed, clean linen, and warm water Then he laid Arril down, took off the bloodstained bandage, and discovered a long, deep, jagged wound all along one side of the boy's head This he bathed and bound up, Arril lying unconscious, breathing heavily Then, having done all he could, Bran sat down on the floor by his friend's side and watched him He reflected that, though Arril had come home alive, it was about all that could be said for him He would need every care if he were to go on living

The afternoon wore on, troubled by the wailing of women for Prince Madoc and their own men slain, and the bustle and clatter of those who were returning to their own homes Most, however, meant to stay for the Prince's funeral For a funeral, especially that of a chief, meant games and feasting, and they did not wish to miss it.

Evening drew on, and still Arril lay motionless, his face flushed, sometimes muttering a little, but for the most part lying still with his eyes half open, breathing loudly A woman brought Bran food, and he ate, and tried to get Arril to drink a little milk, but without success After this he must have dozed, for he was startled to find a man standing beside him Looking up, he recognized Moran, and just managed not to start violently.

Moran was looking at Arril, not pleasantly Bran raised his head and looked straight at his old enemy, to see if he would be recognized Apparently Moran did not know him, for he scarcely glanced at Bran, but said, trying to speak carelessly

'The poor lad hath had a hard knock What is his name?'

Bran was perfectly sure that Moran knew.

'Arril is his name,' he answered 'He was Madoc's charioteer'

There was no fear that Moran would recognize Bran's voice, which had become very deep as he grew towards manhood.

'Was well loved of the Prince that is dead, is it not?' Moran went on

'I have heard so,' answered Bran shortly. He was wondering whether he would kill Moran then and there, as, since Karko was out of the way, he felt he had a perfect right to do. However, he reflected that there would certainly be a fuss, and a noisy crowd. And noise was bad for Arril His vengeance must wait

'Dwellest thou here?' demanded Moran suddenly

'Nay,' Bran answered 'I come from far.' He did not think it necessary to say more.

Moran said no more either, but gazed at Arril for a few seconds and then slipped away as quietly as he came Bran sat still, puzzling as to what he could have wanted

It was growing dark now The fire in the centre of the dwelling was burning up, but Bran in the curtained corner had very little light. He heard men come in, their heavy footsteps padding on the floor of beaten earth, rush-strewn, and go up to the

fire to warm themselves Their swords clanked as they tossed their cloaks back

'Well,' said one, 'so the pyre will be lit to-morrow's morn.'

'Ay,' said someone else 'They 've chosen the cattle already His horse will go with him of course'

Among Evrawc's people it was considered necessary, in the case of a chief, that cattle, his favourite horses, and even servants, as well as food, weapons, and garments, should be buried with him Consequently there was a good deal of anxiety as to who was going to be thus honoured!

'What men will be sent with him?' asked a worried voice 'We cannot spare any more warriors.'

'Oh, the prisoners we took will serve,' came the answer. Then—and Bran held his breath as he heard it—Moran's voice came, humble as befitted a stranger to the Dun

'I have heard that the Prince loved well his charioteer Will he not follow him to the Land of the Gods?'

'What dost thou know of it, Outlander?' was the rough question

'Nothing,' said Moran gently 'Only I have heard talk This Arril — he is not of your people, I think?'

'Indeed,' said the man who had sounded worried, 'the smith says well Prince Madoc did indeed love the boy—perhaps too well'

'They tell me that he taught ye to ride the backs of horses?'

'Curse the boy! How he did rail at us with that stinging tongue of his! Ay, and had his whip across

our shoulders more than once—he, a beardless lad, and we grown warriors!'

'We should not miss him overmuch,' agreed several. Plainly, Arril had not made himself beloved. The men were only too glad of an excuse to be rid of him.

'Well, I 'll speak to the priest this night,' said the master of the house. 'I have the boy here, safe enough. We must see that he does not escape, though. He may not understand the honour that is being done to him!'

There was some laughter at this, and Bran slipped round the curtain and came up to the group round the fire, resolved on a bold stroke.

'He hath a knock on the head that will keep him quiet,' he said coolly. 'All the same, I 'll watch by him to-night to make sure. I don't think he is likely to escape from *me*.' He bent his arm to show the big biceps.

'Hallo, the wandering smith!' The men turned to look at him. 'I thought thou wast his friend. Art willing to give him to the flames?'

Bran had learned to be a good actor from his practice in story-telling. He smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

'It was not as friends that we parted,' he said. 'He put shameful names upon me. Nay, we came from the same part, but I am grown very weary of his airs.'

'And that is true,' declared one of the men. 'I remember he did not even bid thee farewell.'

'Yet it was the smith who carried him in here and tended his wound,' observed another.

'Well,' said Bran, as if making a confession, 'I

thought maybe the King would give me a reward for the care of his son's charioteer.'

'A long head hath the smith!' laughed the master of the house. 'Well, we'll reward thee, lad, if thou have him safe and alive for the funeral the morn's morn. As for us, we are glad to be let sleep.'

Bran went back behind the curtain and sat down again. His brain was a tumult of thought. So this was Moran's revenge on Arril, whom he had always hated. Bran wished he had killed him when he had the chance, whatever might have come of it. Now he dared not kill him, lest folks should ask why, and it come out that Bran did not want Arril to burn. And his only slender chance of saving his friend was that no one should guess that he wished to save him.

And how this was to be done he could not imagine. To escape out of that well-fortified Dun, with Arril wounded and helpless, looked to be utterly impossible. Should he, then, go to King Evrawc and ask boldly for Arril's life? But by this time the men would have spoken with the priest, and once the priest's choice had been made, the King himself could not alter it. Bran had to admit that it was unlikely that Evrawc would wish to alter it, since Arril had made himself so much disliked by the warriors. Oh, foolish Arril, who would never forget that he was the son of a chief!

It never occurred to Bran that he might leave his friend to his fate, and, with the favour of King Evrawc, win for himself a position of power and comfort in the Dun. No, Arril, with all his faults, was his loved comrade, and that was all there was to it.

The wounded boy lay as before. Bran leaned his

back against the wall and prepared to wait. Perhaps an idea would come to him. He was hardly settled, however, when the skin curtain was pushed aside and a man came in. It was too dark to see who it was, but when he spoke the voice was Moran's.

'I have come to share thy watch,' said Moran. 'It is hard for thee to go all night without sleep.'

'I thank thee,' Bran managed to answer, though his heart nearly stopped beating with dismay. Did Moran suspect who he was? Or was he merely determined to see for himself that Arril did not escape?

The smith sat down, and Bran caught the malignant glitter of his eyes. For a moment he felt absolute despair. He could not think of anything, and sat on in the darkness staring hopelessly before him, until suddenly an idea came into his head which made him sit bolt upright. He could use Moran to help in the escape! Only it was necessary that every one should know that Moran was with him.

'What is it?' asked Moran as the boy stirred in the blackness.

'I am thirsty,' Bran answered. 'I do not see why we should sit here dry.'

He got up, and pushing aside the curtain went into the main part of the house. He had no fear of leaving Arril alone with his enemy, for he knew that it was important that the men who were to accompany Madoc to the Blessed Land should be burned *alive*.

'Moran shares my watch with me,' he announced to the master of the house, who was just settling himself to sleep by the fire. 'We would have mead to drink, for a new friendship needs wetting!'

The man chuckled. 'Art quite right, lad,' he answered. 'Well, there's a skin of mead in the corner yonder—take some. But don't drink yourselves drunk, thou and Moran. It's strong.'

Bran laughed and thanked him, then groped his way to the corner where stood the skin of mead. A drinking horn hung beside it, and Bran took it down, lifted the heavy skin and bore it into the screened corner where Moran awaited him.

Moran was thirsty; he did not seem to have the least suspicion who Bran was. He stretched his hand eagerly for the horn, drained it in three draughts, and asked for more. Bran, grinning to himself, gave it to him. He would have given him a third also, but apparently Moran realized that another drink would drive his senses out. As it was, he was rather fuddled. Bran drank now, making some noise about it, but swallowed very little.

Moran began to talk, thickly and drunkenly. He boasted of his skill in metal working, of his wisdom and his courage. He explained at great length how he had discovered a plot which concerned an Outlander, how he had had that same Outlander driven out of the village and slain (Bran smiled grimly to himself), and finally how he, Moran, ought by rights to be Headman and Master Smith of the Moor Folk, but that he had been exiled by treacherous men who were jealous of him (here, being drunk, he wept). Bran let him babble on, pleased when passers-by stopped, looked in at the doorway, and laughed. He wished it to be as widely known as possible that Moran was there, and that Moran was drunk.

So the time passed on, until Bran judged that most of the folk of the Dun would be asleep. Then

he rose up, stepped across Arril to Moran, and took him by the throat

'Moran,' he said in a low voice, 'I have a score to settle with thee'

Moran's eyes opened wide—Bran could see them glitter—but he could not utter a word because of the powerful fingers that were pressing on his windpipe

'Thou didst seek to slay me on the moors,' Bran went on 'Thy hands were at my throat, even as mine are at thine' He pressed harder, and Moran clawed at his wrists, vainly trying to break that mighty grip. 'Aha,' said Bran, 'I am the stronger now! Thou didst drive me out of the village, where I had done no harm, thou didst send Garm to slay me—but I slew him instead'

Moran gurgled, and, his senses coming back under the shock, began to kick Bran promptly pushed him backwards and knelt on him

'And,' finished Bran through his teeth, 'thou didst bring the good Amballo to his death! Now thou art seeking to bring Arril my friend to death likewise. For this, thou skulking wolf, I slay thee! I am Bran!'

Moran's struggles ceased, and he flopped limp on the floor Bran held on a minute longer to make sure, felt at his enemy's heart to see that it had really stopped, and then got to work in business-like fashion

Moran was wearing a cloak with a hood to it, and Bran took this off and wrapped it round Arril, pulling the hood over his head to hide the bandage Arril stirred as Bran raised him, and murmured, 'What is it?'

'It is I, Bran,' the boy answered. 'Be still, Arril. All is well.'

Then he lifted Arril to one side, and laid the dead body of Moran on the rugs. No one, glancing in casually, would notice any difference until morning came. Next, he made sure of his axe and knife, slung his bow and quiver over his shoulder, and then raised Arril gently to his feet. The boy was half-conscious, and made some use of his legs, though he would have fallen but for Bran's arm about his waist.

Bran supported him to the door of the hut. The night was cloudy and there was no moon, which was fortunate, though he was quite prepared with a tale if any one noticed him. The night air revived Arril a little, and he moaned and murmured faintly, 'Oh, Bran, where are we going?'

'Be silent,' Bran commanded him. 'All is well.' He stepped out of the door, half carrying his companion, and began to make his way towards the wall. Arril staggered and dragged on him just like a drunken man.

'Holà, smith!' called somebody out of the shadows. 'Whither goest thou?'

'Moran is drunk!' Bran answered disgustedly. 'I 'll not watch the night out with a drunken pig! I go to dip his head in the moat.'

There was an answering laugh and Bran went on, though his heart pounded wildly. He dared not risk Arril's disguise in the full light of the fire that burned by the gate, so he made for the nearest part of the stockade. He had no further interruptions, but reached the black shadow of the wall without hindrance. Here he laid Arril gently down, and

began to feel about for footholds. He must know the way up before risking it with his friend on his back, dangerous as it might be to delay.

Several times he had to abandon the climb and try another place, but at last he found a way up. It was horrible to have to leave Arril lying there, but he must make as sure of his way as possible. Alone, it would have been nothing to him to drop into the moat, swim across, and scramble up the mound. But with a wounded companion it was another matter. He had no rope, and something of the sort was necessary if he were to lower Arril safely to the water. Well, he would have to sacrifice his clothes again; luckily it was early summer.

He unfastened the belt that held his tunic, took off the cloth, and buckled on his belt again over his naked body. Then with his knife he slashed and tore the garment into strips, knotted them together, and coiled the rope so formed over his shoulder. Then he scrambled down the outer side of the stockade, took off his bow case, and holding it above the water swam to the other side of the moat—a few strokes only. There he laid it down, together with his quiver and his axe, which might have hampered him, swam back, climbed the stockade once more, and slipped down beside Arril.

The boy was lying quietly where he had left him. Bran bound his hands together with a strip of cloth, so that the helpless arms would be kept about his neck, and he could have hands and feet free for climbing. He was just about to hoist Arril on to his back, when a figure loomed up at his side, and a voice demanded:

'Who are ye, and what are ye doing?'

Bran acted like lightning. The man, whoever he might be, was taller than he, but the boy sprang like a tiger. His fist shot out, with all his weight of bone and muscle behind it, and caught the man on the jaw, so that he went down with a thud and lay still

Bran did not wait to find out how much hurt he had done He swung Arril up on his back and began to climb, hoping that he would succeed in getting over the top before his victim opened his eyes and looked up That minute or two when they would show against the sky would be the most dangerous of the whole adventure

Well for Bran that his childhood had been spent among cliffs and rocks! Well for him that his muscles were tough as the roots of an oak, and that his fingers had a grip like a vice! Well that his chest was broad and deep so that his breathing was full and strong! Well that his neck was thick and round, so that Arril hanging from it a dead weight did not choke him!

Up and up he went, and on the top he perched for an instant, took off the rope of cloth and fastened one end to Arril's belt, then swung his friend gently over and down When he had paid out all the rope he could, he fastened the end he held to a strong stake, and then climbed down himself

Arril was hanging a few feet above the water Standing up to his waist in it Bran unfastened the rope, took Arril in his arms and let them both sink backwards into the moat With his hands under his friend's armpits he gave a few vigorous kicks which brought him across to where his weapons lay.

There was no noise on the other side of the wall, so apparently the man he had knocked down had not

recovered and given the alarm Once more Bran gathered up his weapons, took Arril upon his back, supporting him this time with hands clasped behind, and began to climb the mound If any one had been there to see (which Bran thanked the gods was not the case), they would have looked a funny sight enough. Bran stark naked but for his belt, and dripping with water, Arril lying limp across his back, wet through also, with runlets of water streaming from his clothes and hair However, exercise kept Bran warm, and the heat of his back penetrated to Arril's breast as he lay

Climbing the mound was easy compared with what had gone before Now that Karko was dead there were no guards about, and no one to notice the two as they crossed the open space, went through the fields, and entered the grim dark forest beyond the clearing

Very dark and very grim it looked, the trail almost invisible, and Bran had to feel with his feet for the way It being early summer, there was less danger from wolves than in winter, but even so Bran felt distinctly nervous For the most part, especially so near to human dwellings, the beasts would hesitate to attack man But there was always the chance that some rash yearling, or old wolf disappointed in the kill and reckless with hunger, would be met with prowling in the forest glades However, luck was with them, and before dawn broke the fugitives were far into the woods

Here Bran stopped, for he was tired, and knew that he must save his strength Also, he wanted to see how Arril fared It was not likely that they would be able to escape unpursued, the hunting dogs

would be loosed on their trail, and the odds would be heavily against their outwitting Evrawc's trackers. But it was absolutely necessary that they have a little rest. He looked to the bandage about Arril's head, settled him as well as he could among the dead leaves, and then himself lay for a few minutes with every muscle relaxed, getting rest as thoroughly as he could. He dared not stay for long. As soon as he felt his fatigue stiffening upon him, he leaped up, looked round for the tallest tree near by, and began to climb it.

He went up as far as he dared, until the upper branches bent and swayed beneath his weight, and looked abroad over the sea of green. Backward by the way they had come he looked, and saw the edge of the forest, the fields, and Evrawc's Dun in the distance with morning smoke going up. To his relief there were no moving figures between him and the Dun. If they had discovered the escape, they had not yet started in pursuit. If and when they did, however, they would go far faster than he could do.

And at this point it may be explained (though Bran never knew it) that there was no pursuit at all. When it was discovered that Bran had carried off his friend in the night, Evrawc, who knew his story, said firmly that the boy had done well and nobly, and that he was to be suffered to go free. The manner of the rescue was made out, by the testimony of the man who had questioned them, the one who had been knocked down, by Moran's dead body, and by the rope hanging from the stockade, and every one was a little awed by the strength and ingenuity of the lad who had carried it through. They were

rid of Arril whom they hated And if Evrawc grieved for the loss of Bran, he said nothing about it

Of all this, however, Bran was ignorant As far as he knew, they were likely to be chased at any moment, and something must be done quickly Northward the forest stretched as though it had no end, up hill and down dale Westward a line of jagged hills reared up South-west—Bran started, clutched at a branch and leaned forward eagerly to make sure—yes—that was the gleam of water! He could follow the course by the openings in the trees. A river, and as far as he could judge, no small one If he could reach that, he had a pretty good chance of escape

Just where he was going to escape to and what he was going to do he left to settle itself Quickly he slid down his tree and took the moaning Arril upon his back

'Oh, let me rest!' the wounded boy complained as he was lifted 'My head! My head!'

Bran was very sorry for him, but he had no time to sympathize He needed all his breath now, for he had to leave the trail and break through the underbrush Briars caught at his bare flesh and branches whipped across his unprotected face, but he blundered along, head down, saving Arril as much as possible.

It was difficult, too, to keep the right direction, here where the forest was so thick that it almost shut out the sun. However, the leaves were not yet fully out, which made things better than they might have been, and after an hour and a half of very bad going they arrived, Arril sobbing with pain and Bran

panting, sore and bleeding, on the banks of a river that flowed to the south-west

There was still no sound of pursuit, but Bran knew that the only safety lay in cutting off the scent as soon as he could. So he stepped into the water, holding Arril with one hand and with the other clinging to the branches that overhung the banks He waded downstream for about a hundred yards, sometimes knee-deep in mud, sometimes up to the waist in water Then he climbed out upon the bank, set Arril down, and dropped down himself for another much-needed rest

He was very nearly spent, but it would not do to give in yet. Presently he got up stiffly, plucked his axe from his belt, and selecting a good-sized tree began to chop It was a nuisance that he had to make a noise, but some means of getting downstream quickly he must have. He made the chips fly, weary as he was Axemanship was one of his accomplishments, and in a surprisingly short time (though it seemed long enough to him) he had the trunk severed so that it fell close to the river bank. Then he hewed off the length he needed, stripped it of branches, stood considering it with aching arms akimbo. He had neither time nor materials to make a raft or canoe His idea was simply to bestride the log and let it carry them both down the river

When he had his breath back he cut a sapling pole to balance and steer with Then he pushed the trunk into shallow water, lifted Arril on to it, seated himself astride with his friend's head on his shoulder, and cautiously pushed out into midstream

It took a good deal of careful balancing to keep them the right way up, but luckily the river was

smooth-flowing The pole helped to steady them, and to keep them from running aground or twisting into a backwater with the force of the current

So they swept along, while the sun beat down upon them and clouds of mayflies rose and danced upon the surface of the water. Under green cool arches they sped, where the trees leaned over and touched the river Between high banks where the reeds stood tall and meadowsweet and cuckoo flower blossomed, out into wide marshy spaces where the stream sped sluggishly, and Bran had to be careful that they did not stick in the mud

All that day they drifted on, for though Bran ached with hunger and his eyes smarted with weariness, he wanted to put as much space as possible between themselves and Evrawc's Dun

Just before dark shut down, when he was thinking of making a landing for the night, he noticed that the log was not making progress. It hung in the stream, and when he tried to pole it on, it was only with much effort that he could get it to move His heart gave a little thump of excitement, for he knew that he was feeling the turn of the tide—that not so very far off now the river ran into the sea!

CHAPTER XX

PIRATES!

BRAN had only brief snatches of sleep that night, beside a fire that he dared not pile up very high lest, though it repelled the wolves, it might bring down upon them the attentions of robbers. With Arril helpless, he did not feel that he could cope with such. The wounded boy was still only half conscious, and though he roused a little and inquired vaguely where he was, he did not seem much interested in the answer. Bran felt worried about him, and wished he dared put up a shelter. But still he was afraid that they had not come far enough.

Early in the morning he took his bow and arrow and shot a pigeon. He would have liked to make Arril some soup, but had nothing to boil it in, so was forced to feed his patient on shreds of the roasted flesh. Arril found it hard to swallow, but Bran finished up the rest of the bird, gnawed the bones and chewed the legs, and felt that he could have done with two or three more. It is surprising how little meat there is on a wood-pigeon when you have eaten nothing for thirty hours.

The tide was running down again now, so Bran, having carefully covered up all traces of his fire, carried Arril down to the river and set him on the log once more, and the voyage began again.

The river was joined now by another, and the broad flood rolled down strongly towards the sea. Bran fancied he could get whiffs of salt breeze, and it helped his weariness as he filled his lungs with it.

Before the end of the day the river had become an estuary, and Bran felt that they might safely make a camp

Accordingly, he brought the log to land, helped Arril off, and carried him into the shelter of the trees Here he determined he would build a hut, and there they would stay until Arril should be well enough to discuss what they should do next.

Bran worked very hard that evening First he went hunting, and brought in a deer. This was astonishingly good luck, for it would last several days and leave him free to attend to Arril, about whose continued unconsciousness he was getting very uneasy. Also the skin would be most useful to him, to keep his friend warm For himself, naked though he was, he did not care It was May, and the weather warm enough for his hardy body

Then, having no pots, he made a hole in the ground, hung the deer's stomach, carefully cleaned and full of water, in it, and dropped hot stones into it until the water boiled By this ancient method he was able to make Arril some soup The wounded boy took it more easily than he had done the meat, and soon after sank into a more natural sleep than he had had for three days

Next, Bran stretched the deerskin on a willow frame to keep it from shrinking, tying it in place with strips of the intestines And finally, it being now dark, he gathered wood and piled up a good-sized fire Then he himself ate a much-needed meal

He dared not sleep long this night either Most of the time he sat with his arms about his knees, staring at the flames and wondering what was going to happen to him and his companion He turned over

a good many plans in his mind, and finally decided that, as soon as Arril was well enough, they would travel down the river to the sea, make their way along the coast, and then turn southward in search of the Moor Folk. He reckoned that the stream they were on should presently bring them to that coast which he had visited more than once in past years.

Or perhaps they would make a home for themselves at some village where men would be glad of his forging and Arril's shooting. Or—oh, well, leave it to the gods!

He had just got to this point when Arril's voice came to him, fretful, but clear and sane.

'Bran! Art thou there?'

Bran was at his friend's side in a moment.

'What is it, Arril? Art thirsty?'

'Bran, where are we? What does all this mean? I cannot remember what hath happened—it is all dark——'

Bran saw with joy that Arril was really conscious at last. He felt his lips and forehead, and they were cool and damp. The fever was gone.

'Thou art better!' he exclaimed joyfully.

'But where are we?' Arril persisted pettishly. 'I remember a battle—a battle—ah! And is Prince Madoc really dead, or did I dream it?'

'He is dead,' said Bran gently. 'And thou wert wounded nearly to death. Dost thou not remember coming to the Dun, walking beside the chariot, and falling into my arms?'

'I remember darkness, and being on thy back—or did I dream that too? And pain in my head,' Arril said. 'But oh, my Prince! my Prince! Why did I not die with thee, my Prince?'

'Very nearly thou didst,' Bran told him grimly 'They would have cast thee living upon the bale-fire of Madoc That is why I brought thee away'

'I have no thanks for thee!' cried Arril 'Why didst thou not let me die with him? Why should I care to live now he is dead?'

'Surely thou wouldst not wish to be burned alive!' exclaimed Bran.

'Where shall we go now? What shall I do? There I had honour and fellowship—now I am an outcast without a home! Bran, thou didst very ill to take me away'

Bran felt this was a hard return for his efforts

'We will go to the Moor Folk,' he said 'They will give us shelter——'

'And old Amballo will treat me as a child' Arril seemed determined not to agree to anything

'Amballo is dead,' Bran said briefly.

'Then Moran will be Headman, and that is worse'

'Moran is dead too I have killed him But rest now, Arril, and in the morning when thou art stronger I will tell thee all.'

'No,' said Arril, with the wilfulness of sickness, 'tell me now How can I rest with all this confusion in my mind?'

So Bran went over the story of his last visit to the Moor Folk, and Amballo's death, then of how Moran had fled away and come by strange chance to Evrawc's Dun, and tried to bring about Arril's burning Then, very shortly—but Arril by questioning dragged details out of him—he told how he had carried his friend out of the Dun by night, and brought him down the river The tale roused Arril to penitence

'Oh, my Bran!' he cried remorsefully, 'I am a thankless wretch! But, see thou, I am full of grief for my Prince, and at first I did not think of thee.'

'It is nothing,' said Bran. 'Thou art weak and in pain, and did not know what thou wast saying.'

Arril lay still for a few minutes, piecing things together. Presently he said:

'Evrawc loved thee. Thou mightest have stayed and had honour, and a home for ever. Oh, Bran, I think that no one ever had a friend like thee! How didst thou carry me over that great wall, and through the forest? No wonder thy face is thin and thine eyes all dark and weary!'

'It is nothing at all,' said Bran again. 'Sleep now, Arril, that thou mayest get thy strength back. To-morrow I will make thee a better shelter and a softer bed.'

The next few days were busy ones for Bran. He cut down saplings and made a wall, banking it with earth and sods. Then he roofed this with boughs and more sods, and made a bed within it for Arril, who was still too weak to walk. He nursed and tended his friend, making him hot soup and going to great pains to catch crayfish to make a change of diet. He did this with little wicker pots such as he had been used to catch lobsters in.

Arril gained strength rapidly now. On the fourth day he was able to walk a little, with Bran's arm about him, and then he insisted that he should keep watch, and give Bran a chance to sleep. By this time, indeed, Bran needed sleep very badly. He lay down on the floor of the hut and never stirred for ten hours.

The boys remained in their forest camp for another twelve days, and during this time they made a bow for Arril, and arrows whose points were hardened in the fire. They had no flint for arrowheads, but contrived to make a deadly enough weapon all the same, when wielded with such skill as was Arril's.

Between the two of them the hunting was easy. The weather was tolerably kind to them, they had plenty to talk about, having been so long separated, and though they were cut off from other people they were, on the whole, very happy. Arril, to be sure, had fits of bitter grieving for his lost Prince Madoc, and occasionally would reproach Bran for having saved him. But as his health mended his interest in life increased.

He began to make plans for getting back to his homeland by seeking out some trading ship going east, and making his way overland. He had no idea, of course, of geography. Bran pointed out, first, that he would be horribly sea-sick, second, that the chances were dead against his ever finding the way; third, that he would have to pass through many unknown and probably hostile tribes, and finally, that he did not know what might have happened to his people during all these years. But Arril still played with the idea.

It was warm, bright weather when they left their forest shelter and began to make their way down the river seawards. Bran would have made a coracle to take them down more swiftly, but Arril said that he did not trust the water. Bran pointed out that he was planning a much longer voyage, but Arril retorted that in that case he would have quite enough of the water and did not want any more now.

So Bran gave in—after all he did not much care—and they began their journey on foot

They went slowly, stopping to play about, bathe and hunt and laze in the sun Bran tried to teach Arril to swim, without much success, but they had a good deal of fun over it At last the river mouth opened widely out, the water turned salt, and the wind blew in strongly from the south-west, carrying with it the sea-scent that Bran loved

They came upon a fishing village, and went in boldly, Bran sure of a welcome from people whose ways he understood They were both of them tired of living on meat and fish, and wanted a drink of milk and a taste of barley-bread to make a change They found the folk kindly and pleasant, and glad enough to barter a few arrowheads and some food for Bran's stories and the work of his stalwart arms The two boys were glad to talk with other people again, though Arril had little in common with the Fisher Folk.

They learned, however, that Bran had been right in his calculations, and that they had not far to go before a southward turn would lead them up to the moor. Indeed they might have gone inland at that point, and passed through the thick forest and over the marshes where Bran had found the folk who built the artificial island, but they heard that the Dark Folk were at feud with their neighbours, and they had no wish to get mixed up in the quarrel

So they went further along the coast, Arril equipped now with arrows and Bran with some fish-hoops and a small net with which he intended to try for shrimps; and then of a sudden all their plans came

to nothing, and a thing befell them that neither had dreamed of

It happened on a hot, steamy day when there was scarcely a breath of wind blowing and a haze lay over the sea They had been bathing on a strip of sand, and now Bran was industriously pushing his net through the shallow waters, while Arril sprawled on the beach and threw stones into the ripples They were neither of them paying attention to anything in particular, when the splash of oars made Bran look suddenly up Out of the mist a long, low vessel, grey of sail and grey of hull, had crept up close to the land, almost invisible until close in. From her a small boat was speeding to shore, rowed by men whose hair was shaggy and caked with salt. In the prow stood a man with a drawn sword in his hand, who pointed to the boys and said something, laughing, to the men who rowed.

Bran sensed danger and made for the beach. So did Arril, for he leaped up and seized his bow

'Run, Arril, run,' Bran panted, for all at once he understood the meaning of that long, wicked-looking craft 'Pirates!'

Arril ran like the wind Bran dropped his net, caught up his bow and quiver and followed as fast as he could But, as has been said, his heavy frame was not built for running, his feet sank in the sand and he made but poor progress He heard the boat grind up the beach, heard the splash as the men sprang out of her, and the shout of the leader Arril was well away, he would be able to escape and reach the shelter of the woods, but Bran knew that he himself had no chance Preferring not to be caught

running, he stopped short with heaving chest and calmly faced his pursuers.

It was no use shooting at them At best he could only drop two before the rest would be upon him, and to shoot would only make them angry So reasoned Bran's cool brain, and he waited with a laugh

Then all at once the foremost man checked, staggered and clutched at his throat Bran saw a feathered arrow sticking out of his neck as he crumpled up, while another man gave a yell as an arrow pierced his breast Arril had stopped in his flight and was sending his arrows with deadly aim Another man rolled over, but meanwhile the rest had reached Bran and gripped his arms

'Arril! Arril! Run while there is time!' Bran shouted.

'Ay, and send no more of thine arrows, thou young demon,' roared the leader, 'or verily we will make an end of this friend of thine'

'Fight, Bran!' Arril called back 'Throw them off! I have yet two arrows—use thy knife'

'Arril, thou art a fool,' Bran answered 'Go! Go! Go! Here come more'

The pirate craft had drawn in to the beach, for the water was deep close up to shore, and she drew little water Men had leaped from her side and waded in, and were coming up to help their companions Arril, sending his last two arrows into the group, threw down his bow and walked back towards the pirates.

Bran had not resisted at all, but when he saw his friend quietly giving himself up when he might have escaped, he gave a great sob.

'Oh, Arril!' he said, 'why didst thou do it?'

'Why didst *thou* not make a fight?' Arril demanded fiercely.

'Nay, he 's a wise lad,' declared the leader of the pirates. 'He knows when all 's up Now we 'll not hurt either of ye, if ye 'll come quietly, for all that thou, young one, hast slain four good men'

'What will ye do with us?' cried Arril

'I know not yet what we will do with thee—tame thy wild spirit, at least. But for this sturdy friend of thine'—he gave Bran's arm a shake—'many would give a good price for so strong a slave.'

Bran caught Arril's wrist just in time to prevent him from striking his dagger into the breast of the pirate

'Arril, Arril,' he cried, 'why wilt thou make bad worse? Look ye, lads,' he continued, 'I can see when there 's no use in struggling, and I 'll come with ye And if ye are wise, ye will bear with this my friend for all his tantrums. Ye have seen his archery—and I tell ye that there is no man in this land hath his skill with a horse'

Arril stamped furiously 'I 'll never show my skill if I am made a slave,' he exclaimed

The pirates laughed 'These are brave words,' said one. 'But wait till we have had the handling of thee Thou 'lt speak smaller then—or we 'll feed thee to the fishes. Come along now'

Bran went with them unresisting, putting on as cheerful an air as he could muster, though his heart was very heavy at the thought of the trouble into which he had brought his comrade Arril, seeing that if he struggled he would have to submit to being dragged, came too, head held very high and haughty,

while the pirates jeered at his airs They were ordered into the smaller boat, and Bran, seeing that they were short of men owing to Arril's shooting, offered to take an oar His vigorous pulling earned him the further good-will of his captors, who were already inclined to like him

'By the West Wind,' said the leader, 'thou spared us some trouble, lad, when thou camest without fighting That arm of thine would have laid out a man or two'

'I am no fighter,' smiled Bran, 'but a worker of bronze'

'Thou hast handled an oar before,' said the pirate

'I have been a fisher in my time,' explained Bran

Arril curled up in the bottom of the boat and said nothing He was already feeling sick, and his proud spirit was oozing away By the time they were well out to sea his brown face had turned a greenish-yellow, and he was limp and silent

Then the small boat was brought alongside the larger one, and the captives sent aboard to be questioned by the captain He greeted them with an angry growl, and snarled at his men·

'Four men lost in the taking of two boys! Why did not one of you cut the young fiend down?'

'Shouldst have been there to do it thyself!' was the surly answer 'Such an archer I never saw. He dropped each man as coolly as though he were practising at the target at fifty paces'

'Well, he looks tame enough now,' said the captain, surveying Arril's drooping figure. Then he sat down on a tub in the stern and proceeded to question Bran

'And whence art thou?' he asked

'From inland,' Bran answered. He guessed that

the object of the pirates in taking them was probably more to get information concerning villages that might be raided than for their value as slaves 'I am a wanderer, a maker and mender of bronze And lately I am an outlaw.'

'A worker of bronze, art thou? Well, that we shall presently prove But whence comest thou last?'

'Down the river,' Bran answered.

'Hast passed any dwellings of man?

'None,' said Bran firmly.

'That is certainly a lie, for I myself know that there is a village of the fishers not more than a day's journey off'

'I do not know of it,' said Bran

The captain reached out and plucked at the fish-hooks hanging from Bran's belt

'These are the work of the Fisher Folk, for I know it,' he said menacingly

'I got them afar off, from fishers on the south-west coast' Bran was determined that no words of his should betray the kindly villagers

'Now how if we put fire between thy fingers—or draw off thy thumbnail, if thou wilt not tell what thou knowest?' threatened the captain.

'I should be worth the less when thou sellest me,' Bran answered fearlessly 'Moreover, I do not know anything to tell'

'He is right, captain,' one of the men broke in 'What could he tell that we cannot find out for ourselves? He cost us much to catch Let us not maim him now we have him.'

'A-well,' agreed the captain. 'Maybe that is so And now'—he laid a rough hand on Arril's shoulder —'what art thou?'

'I think I am dying,' answered Arril faintly.

'Rotten fish!' sneered the captain 'Thou 'lt be right enough when we are two days out But I do not know if he is worth anything,' he added, looking over the boy's slender limbs 'Chiefs do not want a slave to shoot arrows, and I cannot see what else he would be good for '

'He is a prince of charioteers, and a master of horses,' exclaimed Bran, afraid once more for Arril's life.

'Hm Ye have both chosen crafts that cannot be tested at sea However, thy big arms at least are good for rowing Put him into Magar's place, men And tumble this sick lad out of the way until his stomach has had time to settle itself, when we will see what worth he is '

CHAPTER XXI

THE ISLE OF GOLD

FIRE and blood marked the passage of the pirates as they swept along the coast. They raided village after village, burning huts and carrying off such folk as pleased them to be sold as slaves. They lifted also treasures of bronze and gold, amber and jet and cloth and hides, until their ship rode deep in the water and their stern was crowded with wailing or cursing captives.

Bran toiled at the oars, behaved himself cheerfully, told tales at night out of his store to the gaping, laughing listeners, and locked deep in his heart his rage and sickness at what he saw

One night he ventured to ask where they were going, and was told that they were making for the Golden Isle. The words sent a thrill through him, for more than once he had heard tales of that western island (Ireland we call it), whose hills were of gold and whose rivers of silver Ireland was indeed one of the four gold countries of that time, the others being northern Greece, Hungary, and Spain Most of the gold that decked the chiefs of the Isle of Mists had been brought from the Golden Isle

Arril got over his sickness in a few days, but was sullen, proud, and intractable They kept him bound because once he tried to throw himself overboard, and it is likely that they would have killed him out of hand for being a nuisance had it not been for Bran

Bran told them in so many words what he would do if they hurt Arril

'If ye slay my friend,' he said, 'some of ye will be badly hurt.' He clenched his fist 'Also, ye slay me. Neither bite nor sup will I take, and ye cannot make me So—lose one, lose both '

So partly because they were short-handed and needed him, partly because they looked forward to getting a good price for his great strength, and partly because they liked him, for Bran's sake Arril was spared.

Having got their fill of booty, the pirates now made westwards, and ran their ship into a rocky cove on the south coast of Ireland This was their stronghold, and here was a round fort, and huts about it, and wild long-haired women who gave their returning men shrill welcome

The slaves were let alone to do much as they pleased, since there was no possibility of their escape They were given food, but that was all Bran collected some of those who had kept their courage and energy, got a fire going in a sheltered place, and made things as comfortable as possible Arril sat with his head on his knees and refused to speak

The pirates celebrated their return with noise, drinking, and rowdy songs Presently Bran was sent for to tell stories, and went with outward good-humour. They kept him at it until morning, when the last of them tumbled down in a drunken heap

'Now,' thought Bran, looking at the prostrate forms, 'now is the time to get away, if only the others have the courage '

He made his way over the shingle to where his

companions crouched or lay, and spoke to them in low, urgent tones

'They are asleep,' he said 'Now is the time to seize their ship! Come all of ye and help me launch her.'

But there was no response

'The tide is against us,' growled one of the men

'The women would hear and warn the pirates'

'We do not know the coast'

'We cannot handle so large a ship.'

'There is no food aboard her'

'Where should we steer for?'

'Art *thou* our captain, that thou shouldst command us?'

'Was anything ever gained by thinking of the odds against it?' cried Bran 'Nay, but by seizing the one only chance It was thus I made my way out of Evrawc's Dun in the dark, with this my friend helpless on my back, and brought us both safely down the river!'

'For what?' muttered Arril, raising his head 'To be sold as slaves And thou didst not even fight for freedom, but gave in tamely Why talk now of escaping?'

Bran saw that it was hopeless, and gave a deep sigh. Then, being tired, he lay down and fell sound asleep until the sun was high

When he woke and looked about him he felt deeply disappointed If this was the Golden Isle, it was not much to look at But perhaps the hills of gold were further inland

The pirates slept long that morning, and woke stupid and surly with their night's carouse The women, however, were awake and about, and Bran

put on his best smile and went to see if he could get some food

The housewives were not disposed to be very good-tempered either But after he had fetched several heavy buckets of water from a spring, and chopped a log of driftwood into pieces convenient for the cooking fire, all with the cheerfulest grin that seemed to say that such work was the pleasantest possible, the captain's wife relaxed the frown that wrinkled her face and gave him a string of fish and a pot of meal for making cakes.

'Ye must do your baking for yourselves,' she said tartly 'I have no time to fash myself with such. And I know not what Durmand the captain will say——'

'Surely,' said Bran, looking at her with laughing eyes, 'he'll get a better price for slaves that are sleek and well-liking than those that are sickly and scrawny!'

'Now don't go feigning that thou hast a care for my man's wealth, or ought else than thy big body's hunger!' she answered, laughing too But he knew that his shaft had gone home, and that the slaves might look to be better cared for

He left the food to be prepared by the women prisoners, and himself went scrambling up the cliffs in search of young sea-birds It was too late for eggs He reflected as he did so how easy it would be for him to escape, and hiding away among the rocks make his way gradually to some dun or village where he might find work for his craftsman's hands But always there was Arril—he could not possibly leave Arril.

When he came down again, with two or three half-

fledged birds of a late brood, an appetizing smell of baking cakes and toasting fish awaited him The captives were looking more cheerful at the prospect of food, and ready to forget the way they had treated Bran the night before Very well then, Bran was quite willing to forget it also—even when they doled out to him a share of the food he had himself brought in as if they were doing him a favour It was a very small share, and Bran was very hungry, but he made no fuss and took what was given him He was pleased to see that Arril looked brighter, and ate with a better appetite than he had shown since his capture

They were still eating when Durmand the pirate captain swaggered up, two or three of his men behind him

'Hallo, thou, Bran Redhead,' he said loudly, 'saidst thou wast a bronze-smith '

'Ay,' Bran answered

'Come and prove it then And if thou hast been lying——'

Bran got up quietly, sure of his skill and not at all alarmed They went up some steps in the cliff to one of the huts, on the floor of which a mixed collection of tools had been spread They were evidently booty swept up pell-mell by the pirates at different times There were chisels, gouges, two anvils, moulds of various sizes, and several broken pieces of bronze ready for shaping Bran looked them over critically He regretted his own tools, to which he was thoroughly accustomed, and the moulds were not of the shape he liked He said nothing, however, but made up the fire and put two or three of the bronze pieces into a melting-pot

'Have ye any bellows?' he asked The pirates shook their heads. They were accustomed to steal their weapons, not make them

Bran shrugged his shoulders, and blew up the fire with the strength of his own leathern lungs He had had to do this before, when working at some hamlet which possessed no smith of its own

Then he ground his chisels, washed and greased the moulds, and made all ready for the casting The pirates stood round, leaning on each other's shoulders, puffing and blowing and passing remarks, generally rude, which were intended to upset Bran's nerve. He took no notice, however, except to ask them to get out of his light By and by they lost interest and drifted away Bran went on working.

It was long since he had done any forging, and the feel of the tools was pleasant to his hand. By evening he had a spearhead and two palstaves cast, and brought them outside to get more light for the delicate work of hammering the bronze to the right hardness and thinness

Durmand the captain came up to him and looked critically at the work Bran showed him how keen the edge was by shearing off one of his tawny curls

'Certainly thou knowest thy craft,' said Durmand, meditatively stroking his beard

'He 's a bonny sailor, a strong oarsman, deft with his tools, and a merry good fellow withal,' declared one of the men 'Let 's have him to our band, captain'

'Ay, we can do with such,' agreed the others 'Though he be but a lad as yet, he 's as strong as any of us, and will be a mighty man'

The captain turned up the end of his beard and chewed it thoughtfully, cocking one eyebrow.

'Come on, captain!' urged the men roughly. 'We want a jolly good fellow like him that can tell a tale, sing a song, or mend an axehead!'

'Right ye are, lads,' agreed the captain at length 'He shall swear fellowship with us this night'

They all took it for granted that Bran would be delighted at the honour done him But the boy looked round at the faces surrounding him, and, friendly and grinning as they were just now, he did not like them One man had lost an eye, another had his nose smashed in, another only half an ear One mouth was twisted into a horrible grimace by a scar running from nose to chin, several had fingers missing, and all the men had a hard, cruel, reckless air stamped upon them by their wild, lawless life These were the men who would be his comrades if he consented, and though he liked a vagabond life well enough and was fond of the sea, the idea of sweeping down upon defenceless villages, burning the good brown corn, and killing hard-working fathers of families, nursing mothers, and little helpless babies did not appeal to him

It was not as though he could appear to consent, and then take the first opportunity of escaping He would have to swear fellowship at once, and this meant the taking of an oath so solemn that it could not be broken without risking the anger of the gods—a very dreadful thing in those days.

He stood up, wondering if this was his last evening alive

'Ye go too fast,' he said, still smiling and friendly 'Ye need warriors to be of your fellowship I am no fighter'

'Maybe, seeing thou art but a lad, thou hast had

but little fighting,' one of the men reassured him jovially 'But thou 'lt soon learn. When thy blood is up, and there's booty under thy hand, thou 'lt fight well enough '

Bran shook his head. 'I do not like fighting,' he said

Durmand whipped out a dagger and set it against Bran's breast The boy stood still for a second, then drew back and cried out as if afraid The pirate laughed.

'Nay, thou art *not* a coward, however thou mayest feign to be,' he said. 'Thou didst not shrink, thy colour changed not, thy heart beat steadily Enough of this talk Come and swear fellowship '

'I will not,' answered Bran flatly

The ring of faces about him grew black and angry

'Bethink thee,' said one of the pirates deeply, 'we can do as we like with thee—toss thee over the cliff, or shoot arrows into thee one by one——'

'At least one of ye will die first,' said Bran, getting ready for action He might not like fighting, but he meant to sell his life dearly

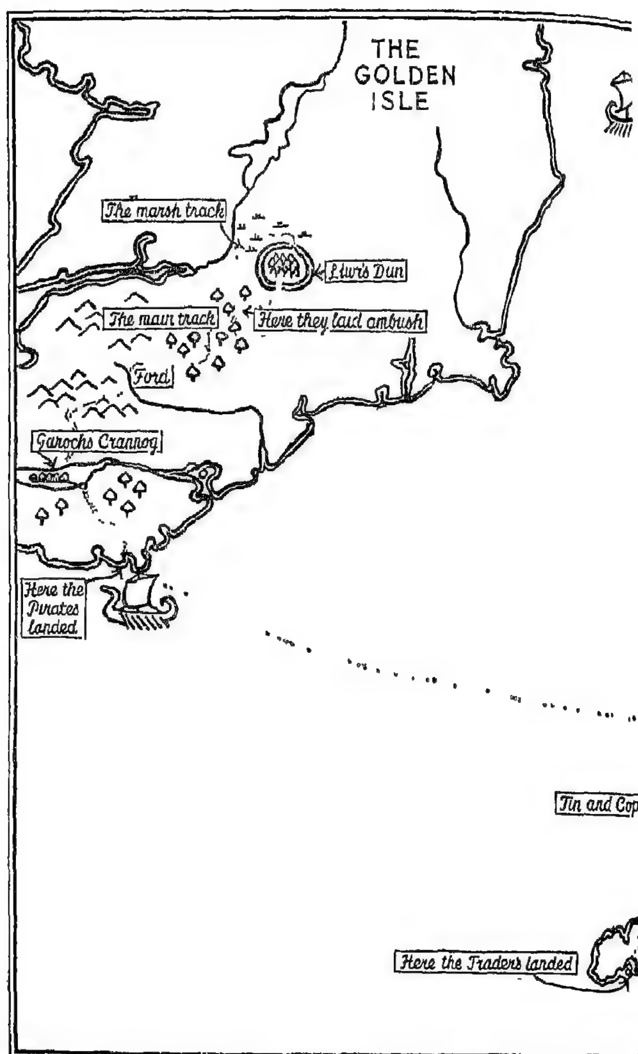
'No, no,' exclaimed the captain 'If he won't join us, we 'll keep him for selling I 'm not going to have a good slave spoiled by arrows '

'Ay, a slave!' growled one 'He 'd be a slave, when he might be a free sea-rover and gather wealth and glory!'

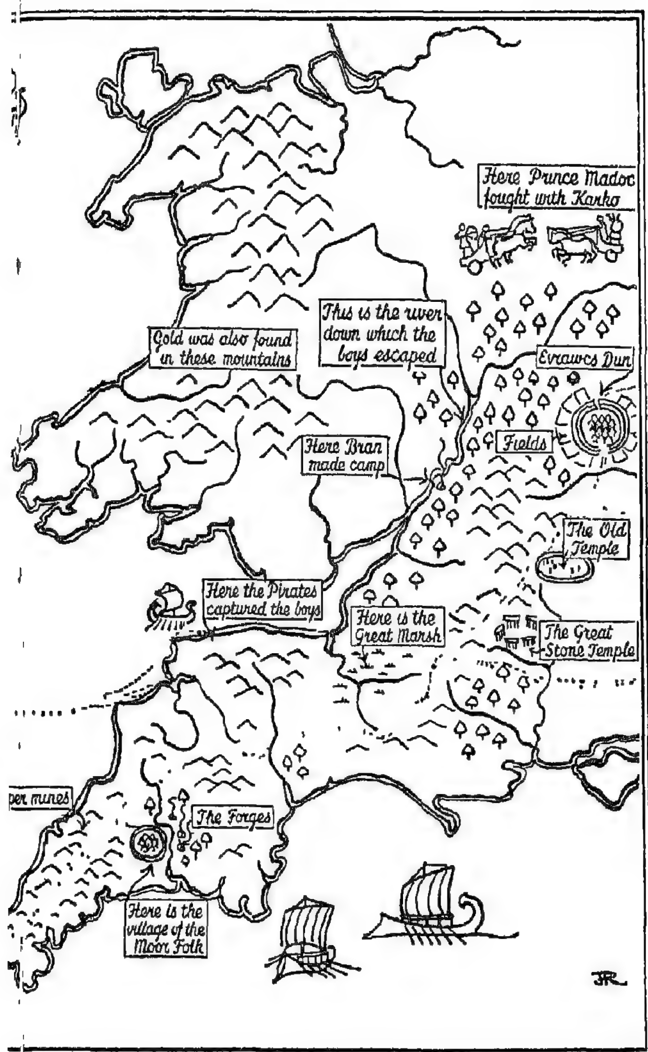
'And die at last by the knife of a woman, or by my own mates squabbling for booty!' said Bran dauntlessly

Every one was so intent on the quarrel that they had not noticed what was going on elsewhere, and the sudden tramp of feet made them all start and look up

'Ho! ho! Durmand the Robber!' bellowed a



THE WANDERING OF



BRAN AND ARRIL

tremendous voice 'Where art thou? I, Garoch, the Hammerer, have come for my dues'

A big man, with fair hair turning grey, little fierce blue eyes and a red face, was standing on a mound, one hand on his hip, and the other swinging a formidable-looking club Beside him was a small dark man with beady eyes and a keen, ratlike face, and behind them a group of well-armed men with spears, swords, and small round targes

'Thy dues, Garoch?' Durmand tried to swagger, but looked rather uncertain

'Ay, my dues. My pick of the slaves thou hast taken, and one-fourth of the booty, or I drive thee and thy rock rats into the sea'

'That were not so easily done,' growled the pirate, and a murmur of agreement came from his men Things began to look like a fight, when the small dark man spoke up

'Durmand hath forgotten,' he said in a high harsh voice 'Doubtless he hath forgotten, while Garoch was away, that Garoch gave him leave to land his ship here in return for part of Durmand's spoil Durmand will remember his oath—also that Garoch's crannog is not so far away'

There was something about this little man that seemed to take all the bravado out of Durmand

'Ay,' he said sulkily, 'I remember I have sworn But indeed I thought, Garoch, that thou hadst made thy peace with Liwr'

The big man scowled terribly, and seemed about to break out in angry words, but the little man touched his arm and whispered something Garoch swallowed his rage with difficulty and advanced towards the pirates.

'Have forth thy slaves that I may choose,' he commanded, and two or three of the men went down the cliff to bring up the captives. In a few minutes they returned, driving the men and women in front of them, and pushed and prodded them into a row two deep before Garoch. Bran quietly went and took his place beside Arril.

There began then an inspection very trying to the prisoners. Garoch and his small attendant, whose name was Vingi, poked and pinched each one as though they had been fowls, felt their muscles, looked at their teeth and made them bend their arms and lift up their legs. The warriors of Garoch made insulting comments.

'Thy women are a poor lot, Durmand,' remarked Garoch finally. 'But I will take that little one with the blue eyes and brown hair. As for the men——'

'The red-haired boy, lord,' said Vingi.

'I had thought the tall fellow with the squint,' said Garoch dubiously.

'Nay,' said Vingi decidedly, 'he is at the top of his strength and will soon begin to weaken. The boy is sound from head to foot, and will grow stronger yet. Besides, thou hast need of a smith, and he is a bronze-worker.'

'How knowest thou that?' demanded Garoch.

Vingi jerked a thumb towards the doorway, where the weapons Bran had been working at lay upon the ground.

'He hath just left them. Look at the tool marks on his hands,' he said.

Garoch looked interested.

'Toss me that dagger blade,' shouted he, and the nearest man brought it up respectfully. The chief

tried it on his thumb, tapped it, and then turned his bloodshot blue eyes on Bran.

'Thy work, boy?' he asked.

Bran nodded. He did not like Garoch or Vingi in the least.

'I'll take him,' said Garoch to Durmand, who looked very displeased. He had counted on getting a high price for Bran, and was disgusted at having his most promising slave taken out of his hands for nothing at all. But it was too late to do anything about it. That cunning little Vingi would see through any excuse that he might make.

Arril, suddenly realizing that Bran was to be parted from him, and that there would be extremely small chance of their ever meeting again, stepped forward now and appealed to Garoch.

'Take me also!' he cried.

'Thou!' Garoch looked the slight figure up and down contemptuously. 'What canst *thou* do?'

'I can tame any horse that ever ran,' Arril boasted, 'and I can turn a chariot in its own length. I can shoot the eye from a bird as far as it can be seen, and that from the back of a galloping horse!'

'And that is true,' confirmed Bran.

Garoch laughed loudly. 'I have no use for horses,' he said, 'and I have archers enough. And yet,' he went on thoughtfully, 'perhaps——'

Vingi pulled at his chief's arm. 'So those two are friends,' he said softly. 'Now when two slaves are friends they are apt to put their heads together for their master's hurt. Moreover, why should Garoch the Hammerer be ruled by the wishes of two boys?'

'Thou art perfectly right,' agreed Garoch. 'I have no need at all of the dark lad. It is the big-

limbed redhead that I will have, and no other Now I will see the spoil, and take my choice'

Arril cast his arms about Bran, and stared at him with a wild, white face

'Oh, Bran! Bran!' he wailed 'My prince, my freedom, and now my friend to be taken from me! Oh, woe, woe! What shall I do?'

Bran held his friend fast for a moment in his great arms, and his broad chest heaved

'Have courage, Arril,' he whispered 'We may find each other again, who knows?'

They clung together, Bran trying to comfort Arril, heedless of the jeers of the rude warriors, until Garoch's bull voice was heard roaring.

'Come on, thou! Come on, I say! Fetch him along, men!'

Two warriors seized Bran by the shoulders and dragged him backward, while another tore Arril away and flung him, panting and sobbing, on the ground Bran did not resist, knowing it to be useless But he looked back over his shoulder, and managed to twist his lips into a brave encouraging smile Then he jerked up his chin and looked straight into the eyes of the evilly grinning Vingi And at that moment Bran knew that the little man could have persuaded Garoch to take Arril if he had been so minded, but that he had separated the friends from sheer black-hearted cruelty, because he loved to see others suffer.

And Bran resolved that no matter what they did to him, he would never give Vingi the pleasure of hearing him groan or seeing him look even grieved He fixed the smile to his lips and held his head up higher than ever as he marched along in the midst of Garoch's men

CHAPTER XXII

THE CRANNOG

Bran became aware, as they strode inland between bare wind-swept hills, that Garoch's men looked at him with kindly enough eyes, and presently one of them said in a low voice

'Thou art a brave lad. Keep thy heart up, and maybe Garoch will have thee into his band in time, and give thee thy freedom'

'Nay, don't raise his hopes,' muttered another 'Didst not mark how Vingi looked at him? The little man hath taken a hatred for him already, because he is straight and strong; and Vingi being little and meagre is ever jealous of such'

'The bog-demons drown Vingi!' growled another under his breath 'Garoch hath not been the same since that black adder wound his way into the village! And it's my belief he made the quarrel with Liwr for ends of his own'

'What manner of man is the lord Garoch?' Bran asked cautiously.

'He was once as brave a lord and gallant a chieftain as ever a man had,' the first warrior answered, speaking very low 'He is the nephew of Liwr, the Great King, overlord of the south country But four years ago came this Vingi, who is of the Earth Folk, the dwellers in this land before our fathers conquered it And now Vingi hath the ear of Garoch, and Garoch hath quarrelled with Liwr and left Liwr's Dun, and——'

'Nay, but it is said that Liwr, old greybeard that he is, insulted Garoch and would not give him his daughter in marriage,' broke in another man. 'So what could Garoch do but plan a vengeance? And he will have it too! We shall yet see him lord of Liwr's land.'

'And much good will it do us, when Vingi hath the sharing of the spoils!' grumbled the first man.

Bran listened to all this carefully, and stored it up in his mind. But the next question he asked did not concern Garoch and Vingi.

'They told me,' he said, 'that this was the Isle of Gold. But I do not see any!'

The warriors guffawed. 'Didst think to see the hills all shining with it, lad?' asked one. 'Nay, then, but it is washed down by the rivers in small bright grains, and men gather it, sand and gold together, and wash it clear of grit in shallow pans. Yes, truly, much gold is washed down by the streams in this land, but the gods have wisely hidden it from all save those who seek it with patience. The little Earth Folk, like Vingi, know where to find the gold. And we, their masters, take it from them, as befits warriors.'

Bran made no comment, but a good deal of his sympathy was with the 'little Earth Folk.' He reflected, however, that, if they were like Vingi, they probably deserved to work hard for their masters!

They came after long tramping to Garoch's village, and Bran drew a deep breath of surprise. He realized that never chieftain in disgrace had a safer place of retreat, but he saw also that it might be an awkward place to escape from. It was, in fact, a place similar to that which he had seen the Dark

Folk of the Glastonbury marshes building when he passed by

Between lowering hills a broad silver lake spread out, and in the middle of the water rose an island ringed about with a stout stockade A narrow causeway ran out to it, and at the landward end of the causeway was a stone hut with a fire burning before it. A man came out of the hut as the band approached, and blew a blast on a great curved trumpet with the mouthpiece set at the side It echoed sonorously back from the hills, and a moment later was answered by another from within the fort A band of warriors came out from the stockade and over the causeway to greet their chief

At their head was a tall, fair-haired boy about Bran's age, whose high cheekbones and bright colouring marked him out as Gaioch's son. He ran eagerly up to his father, but the chief pushed him roughly aside and went on talking to Vingi. The boy flushed deep red with anger, and his blue eyes looked furiously after the two of them.

'Thy father is busy, it seems, Vardia,' remarked one of the men who had talked with Bran

'Oh, speak not to me!' exclaimed the boy angrily, and strode back over the causeway with a haughty swing of his cloak and toss of his head

'Ay, Vingi will push out Vardia, and have his daughter's man, Fergo, in his place, before we are all much older,' was the comment among the warriors

Bran thought the prospect did not seem to please them

With much noise they all trooped over the causeway. Bran looked about him, and saw one or two dugout canoes lying under the shadow of the

stockade They struck him as being clumsy things, heavier and less manageable than the light coracles to which he was accustomed All the same he longed to try his hand at paddling one

Within the stockade around the island were a goodly number of wattle huts (that is, of wicker framework daubed with clay) They were rough, undecorated, and blackened with smoke Bran thought them gloomy and uninviting

A few women were moving about, and the young girl Garoch had taken from the pirates was handed over to them to be instructed in her duties Bran remained with the men, who talked to him in a friendly way and gave him food He slept among the warriors that night.

The next day he was set to work He was given a little hut for a smithy, and tools and bellows. He was kept supplied with wood, but got no other help The warriors, of course, thought it beneath their dignity to blow the fire up, though from time to time they would drop in to pass the time of day and have a chat

This was the first time that Bran had had a smithy of his own, and he was rather pleased about it In time he got it fitted up exactly as he liked, and took great pride in it. He had a central fireplace for the final smelting, and close by it a platform of flat stones for a work-table. A hole in the floor served as a receptacle for his tools, another for sharpening stones A couple of large stones for crushing ore he kept near a second fireplace by the wall This fire-place was lined with clay and had a chimney built up to a hole in the wall so that its smoke could get away easily It was here that he smelted down the

rough ores brought in from time to time All this apparatus was on one side only of the hut The other contained nothing but the skins that formed Bran's bed It was here that the warriors would squat for hours in the evening, laughing and talking

Bran learned a good deal from their talk He heard how the island had been made, four years ago, when Garoch fled from Liwr's Dun Logs had been sunk, and bundles of brushwood piled upon them, weighted with stones, until a mound appeared above the shallow water Then stakes had been driven in to enclose a fairly large space, and a sort of fence made in the lake bottom to keep the island from being washed away. Earth and stones and more brushwood were then piled into the enclosure, and finally a platform was made over it and surrounded by a stockade. The causeway that ran out from the mainland was made in the same way

It was several days before Bran caught another glimpse of the boy Vardia, son of Garoch. Bran had been kept very hard at work, getting his smithy into order, so that he saw hardly any but those who visited him However, one evening, about six days after his arrival, he was watching the cooling of a spearhead while trimming up the seams of a knife, a couple of Garoch's men sitting on the floor with their backs against the wall making remarks at intervals, when Vardia came in quietly and stood with hand on hip, watching the work He said no word beyond a bare greeting, just stayed silently looking on, until Bran took up a hammer and began to harden the edges of his knife It was of no use trying to talk with that din going on, so the warriors presently arose and strolled out in search of supper

Vardia, however, remained where he was, until Bran, feeling that the boy wanted to say something, put down his hammer and looked up

'Is it hard work, to be a smith?' asked Vardia

'Why, no, not so hard,' returned Bran 'It needeth patience, though, and skill'

'Can any man learn?'

'If he be not a fool,' Bran answered 'The craft can be taught easily enough. And if a man be deft and careful, there is naught to stop him from being a good craftsman'

'As good as thou?' asked Vardia

Bran considered for a moment 'I would not say that,' he said presently 'There is always something that cannot be taught, some skill in the hands that maketh a good workman into a master craftsman It is the gift of Diwa the God-smith'

'Diwa is thy god, then?' Vardia had evidently never heard of him 'Would he give me the gift, thinkest thou?'

'Maybe thou hast it,' suggested Bran. 'Dost thou, then, wish to learn the bronze-working?'

'Ay,' said Vardia 'But I think Vingi would be angry'

'What hath Vingi to do with thee?' demanded Bran 'Art thou not the chief's son?'

Vardia flushed dark red, as he had done that day when Garoch disregarded him, and clenched his hands Then he swung on his heel and went out of the hut without another word Bran saw no more of him for several more days

The next thing that happened was a thunderstorm, and it was through the thunderstorm that Bran became acquainted with Æma

The heavy rains had caused the lake to rise, and on the western side of the island, the side most exposed to the wind, part of the stockade was undermined and blew down with a crash early one morning, breaking in the roof of a hut and carrying away part of the platform. All hands were called to repair the damage, for the hut happened to belong to Fergo, Vingi's son-in-law.

The slaves were called up, of course: men and women captured by Garoch and his followers to do the work in the fields and tend the cattle, in order to leave the warriors free for the glorious business of fighting and thieving. They were for the most part the little Dark Folk who had been first in the land before the arrival of the fair-haired Goidels. All of them were set to work repairing the breach.

Bran made himself very useful, standing up to his shoulders in cold muddy water and heaving out timber and stones to those above him. There was a great deal of fuss and noise, Fergo stamping and roaring and ordering every one about, and his wife, Ethna, daughter of Vingi, wailing and screaming about the loss of a gold ear-ring.

Bran saw Ethna's slave-girl Æma vainly searching for it amongst the baggage that had been dragged out of the hut when it fell, and saw, a minute later, Ethna try to hasten her search by a sound box on the ear.

Æma straightened up. She was a tall girl, perhaps fifteen years old, of mixed blood, by her soft brown hair and grey-blue eyes. Bran liked the looks of her. He noted that she did not seem either frightened or angry.

'I think it must have been washed into the lake, mistress,' she said.

'Impossible, girl! I had it on me when the wall fell in, and it was wrenched away. I believe thou hast stolen it! Give it up, or I will have thy back flayed into strips'

Bran, who knew what beating meant, twitched his shoulders sympathetically. Æma only said quietly:

'I have not got it, mistress I will look again.' She came to the edge of the torn platform, looking carefully about in case the trinket had caught among the planks

'Dost thou truly think that it is in the water?' Bran asked her in a low voice.

Æma gave a little start and looked down at him where he stood, all mud-splashed and bedraggled, with a great smear over his nose where he had brushed his hair out of his eyes with a dirty hand

'I think so,' she said, smiling a little 'I shall have to be beaten before she will be satisfied.'

Bran, without saying anything, suddenly tucked his head down, threw up his heels and disappeared Down among the stones and mud and pieces of brushwood he groped, unable to see in the thick water, forced to trust to his clever sensitive fingers to tell the difference between a small stone and a golden ear-ring

Presently his bursting lungs forced him to come to the surface for air He dashed the water from his eyes, drew a deep breath, smiled at Æma and went down again Two or three times he tried, and at last luck favoured him. His fingers met with something smooth and hard, different of feel from stone, and when he brought it above the water a gleam of gold through its coating of mud told him that it was what he sought.

'Is this it?' he said, as, having washed it, he held it out to Æma

'Ah!' she said, 'thou hast it!' and she smiled at him again

Bran looked an odder figure than ever, very red in the face from his exertions, muddy and with his hair streaming little rivulets of brown water all over his shoulders But Æma did not smile mockingly, but gratefully, for she was very glad to be spared a beating She had no time to do more than smile, for Ethna was screamingly demanding her attention, and she hastened to pacify her with the ear-ring Bran went on with the work

After this Bran and Æma never failed to smile at one another when they met, or, if they had time and no one was about, exchange a few words. Bran learned that the girl was not a bought slave, but a captured one Her father was headman of a little hamlet in the hills, and her mother was one of the Earth Folk Her father had quarrelled with Garoch over some cattle, and Garoch had revenged himself by raiding the village, killing the headman, and carrying off Æma Æma disliked Garoch very much, and did not care for her master Fergo. But she hated her mistress Ethna, and still more Ethna's father, the crafty Vingi

'Never make Vingi angry,' she told Bran earnestly 'Garoch does not so much matter He hits hard and then forgets But Vingi never forgives any-one—neither does Ethna Do not have anything to do with them.'

Bran did not see how he could help having to do with Vingi, but Æma seemed so troubled about it that he did not argue Instead he told her about

Arril, and how bitterly he grieved for his friend and wondered what had become of him.

'He is so proud,' said Bran. 'He is the son of a chief, and it is harder for him to be a slave, than it is for me. Also, he loves a warrior's life and the riding of horses and driving of chariots. How will he bear it if they put him to fetch wood and carry water? Perhaps he will refuse, and they will kill him!'

'It is much more likely that he will learn wisdom and obey,' said Æma. Then she heard Ethna calling and hurried away.

Bran worked hard, and was quiet and as respectful as he could manage to Garoch and Vingi. Neither of them, he was thankful to find, took much notice of him. Most of the men liked him, and he enjoyed his work. He was not entirely confined to the Crannog, either, for when there was no great demand for weapons he was sent to the shores to cut wood, or to work in the fields. The men often invited him to join their sports of an evening, so that he got the wrestling that he loved. He was fast coming to his man's strength now, and had to be careful what he did, for his might grew more quickly than he realized it.

Vardia often came to the smithy, and when no one was about took lessons in bronze-working. But he was rather too impatient to make a good craftsman. Bran learned that he was bitterly jealous of Vingi, who seemed to be doing all in his power to take his father's affection from him, and to push his daughter's husband, Fergo, into Vardia's place. Vardia wished to learn the bronze-working in order to have something which Fergo could not do. He

was beginning to fear that, should Garoch die, Fergo would be chosen as chief and through him Vingi rule the Crannog

'And the worst of it is,' said Vardia morosely, 'that the men all honour Fergo for his strength and courage. He is very strong, and a great boaster. He saith that no one can throw him at wrestling—and indeed no one ever hath.'

'Canst thou not?' Bran asked, watching his crucible He was experimenting with an idea of his own for hanging pots, and was too interested in it to pay much attention to Vardia

'I! I am strong, but not so strong as Fergo If I had a chance I would try, for if he were thrown before the men, maybe they would see that he is nothing but a braggart and a bully'

Bran took a ribbon of bronze and twisted it into a ring. He passed another strip through this and closed the end, slipped a third through the second, and considered the effect. Then he pulled upon it and was pleased to find that it seemed strong

'Bran,' said Vardia, 'how old art thou?'

'I have forgotten,' Bran answered. 'Maybe eighteen—maybe nineteen'

He added another link to his chain

'Thou canst not be very old,' said Vardia thoughtfully, 'for thou hast no beard yet'

'It is coming,' Bran declared, feeling at the silky golden down that was just beginning to fluff on his upper lip.

'There is not enough to see on a cloudy day,' Vardia laughed. 'Thou wilt not need to use a razor on thy chin for a while yet'

The younger men of that time were in the habit of

shaving the chin with a curious two-lobed razor, but they left a moustache on the upper lip

'But it is no matter,' Vardia went on 'Thou art younger than Fergo'

Bran wondered what was coming next However, he fitted a bent hook to his chain, and tested it by swinging a pot from it. Such a thing as a chain had not been thought of before He felt it was really a remarkable invention

'Now, thou hast thrown most of the men at wrestling,' said Vardia 'If Fergo should be thrown by a boy—and a slave at that—he would never get over the shame Thou art not tall, Bran, but thou art very thick Stand up'

Bran got up obediently. He saw what was in Vardia's mind now, and did not like it It would mean trouble for him whatever happened

'Hm!' commented Vardia 'Thou art taller than I thought It is thy wide shoulders make thee look short Well, wilt thou put shame on Fergo for me?'

'Perhaps I cannot,' Bran suggested.

He will not dare to hurt thee,' Vardia assured him, 'because thou art my father's slave So if thou throwest him not, things will be no worse, if no better'

Bran laughed shortly He was not in the least afraid of being hurt.

'It is not likely that Fergo would wrestle with a slave,' he said

'Leave that to me!' cried Vardia 'I will so taunt him that for very shame he must'

'Hearken, Vardia,' said Bran 'If I should put down Fergo, and he be shamed before the warriors,

Vingi will be angry with me because I have beaten his daughter's man and spoiled his schemes '

'Bran,' answered Vardia eagerly, 'I like thee, and I have a mind to tell thee *my* schemes. The warriors hate Vingi, and they grow weary of my father because he is ruled by Vingi But they fear the craft of the little man Now, if I could win them to trust in me, I could destroy Vingi and become their chief And when I am chief I will make thee free and give thee whatsoever thou wishest, if thou wilt do this for me!'

Bran thought to himself that there were many 'ifs' to it, and that in the meantime Vingi might work him a good deal of mischief But at the same time there was something in what Vardia said Bran could be bold as well as cautious.

'Thou hast spoken plainly to me,' he said, 'and if thou wilt bear with me, I will speak plainly to thee'

'Speak,' said Vardia

'If, when Fergo is shamed before them, thou wouldst win the warriors to thyself, thou must set their minds on some great adventure '

'That will I!' broke in Vardia eagerly 'We will go a-raiding——'

'That thy father hath done It must be something greater or they will not listen to thee Hearken Thy father was shamed and driven out by Liwr the Great King Do thou lead thy warriors against Liwr's Dun and wipe out that shame!'

'But,' gasped Vardia, 'we are too few! Liwr's men are as the leaves on a tree!'

'Then get thee more men!' Bran's grey eyes were blazing with his idea 'Raid not the villages round about, but win them to be thy friends Send out

scouts who will turn Liwr's own people against him—I hear he is old and foolish! Be not the chief of a band of robbers, but the king of a great kingdom'

Vardia caught fire also His blue eyes flashed and he held out his hand

'By Lo the Sun-god, it is a great thought!' he cried. 'Thou hast the wise head, Bran the Bronze-smith! Do thou stand by me in this thing and I will be thy friend'

'I will stand by thee,' promised Bran 'We will talk more of this, and lay our plans very carefully And first I will shame Fergo for thee, if it may be done'

'By Lo and Miala (sun and moon),' swore Vardia, gently shaking his crushed fingers, 'I think I begin to be sorry for Fergo if thou hast for thy foes such a grip as thou givest thy friends!'

CHAPTER XXIII

BRAN'S CHAIN

Two days later, as Bran came over the causeway with a faggot of firewood on his back, a shout from the warriors greeted him, and two or three dashed out to meet him and hauled him in, laughing and talking

'A wager! A wager!' they cried. 'Vardia Garoch's son hath bet Fergo son o' Riata his inlaid dagger against Fergo's sword-belt that thou canst throw Fergo twice out of three times! It is a match!'

Bran laid down his faggot inside the gateway and glanced about him. There was Vardia, his face flushed and his eyes eager and anxious, the warriors, merry and excited at the thought of a good match; and Fergo himself, sullen and angry at having been drawn into a bout in which he could win little honour, and might well be somewhat shamed

He was a big tall man, this Fergo, taller than Bran by several inches, and longer armed. Bran scanned him closely as he threw off his clothes, and noted that, though bulky, he was inclined to be fat and too thick about the middle Bran himself was as hard as nails, with a waist that was slim and lean compared with his big chest and shoulders. Nevertheless, Fergo was at the height of his strength, and Bran not yet fully grown The boy would have to be wary to overcome the advantage of Fergo's height and reach

The warriors had made a ring, and now stood

silent and deeply interested. The two wrestlers circled each other, legs bent and arms ready for a clutch, looking for an opening. Then Fergo leaped forward and clasped his arms about Bran, seeking to shake him off his feet.

Bran did not try to avoid the hold, for he wanted to feel and judge of Fergo's strength. But he turned slightly so that the fatal grip was missed, and threw his own arms round Fergo's middle and squeezed. For a moment they swayed, locked. Bran felt Fergo's arms tighten and tighten, and let himself go deceivingly limp and slack. Then, when he judged that Fergo had done all he could in the way of hugging, he suddenly tightened up all his muscles, writhed, and broke away panting. Then before Fergo knew what was happening the boy was back again, one arm was about Fergo's loins, the other clutched at his shoulder. Bran heaved.

Fergo was very heavy, and he resisted with all his might. He clutched at Bran and tried to throw his weight back so as to swing him over, but Bran shifted his footing a little and kept his balance. His knee was under Fergo's thigh, and the big man realized to his amazement that he was slowly being pulled over. All at once he gave way. Over Bran's back he pitched ingloriously, and rolled headlong in the dust. First round to Bran.

Fergo rose all dirty and dishevelled, and furious at the laughter of the men. But he was more careful now, and dodged about warily, avoiding a clinch until he should have a chance of the hold he wanted. Bran kept him moving. He knew that his wind was better than Fergo's, and hoped that by keeping his opponent going he would make him lose his breath

But it seemed that Fergo knew this also, for he suddenly stopped, made a lunge and a clutch at Bran, changed his direction, and stooped Bran was deceived by the quickness of the feint As he swung away from the grip that he thought was coming, he found Fergo's arms about his waist and was lifted up, crushed and captive in a bearlike grasp

He tried to twine his legs about Fergo's, but here was where length of limb told Bran was held too high to use his legs with any effect. He got his hands about Fergo's throat, however, and squeezed with all the strength he could muster But that dreadful gripe about his ribs was weakening him.

Fergo shifted his clutch suddenly, and with an arm under Bran's thigh tried to toss him over his shoulder. But at the same moment Bran stiffened, flung himself backward, and the throw only sent him a little into the air He landed on his feet, but, shaken and dizzy, failed to keep his balance and fell over. Even as he fell he twisted sideways, but Fergo was upon him like a thunderbolt Bran clinched and clung to him like a wild-cat, writhing with such vigour that the two of them rolled over and over, twisted together like the roots of a tree, each striving to pin the other's shoulders to the ground.

At last both of them, gasping and glaring, paused for a moment and lay locked in each other's arms, too exhausted to renew the struggle, but both determined not to yield Here the onlookers interfered

'That round to Fergo,' quoth Daun the One-eyed 'Bran was thrown'

'He was not!' hotly interposed Vardia 'He broke from the hold'

'Nevertheless he fell,' said Daun. 'How say you, men? Is not that round to Fergo?'

There was some disagreement, but in the end the verdict was that Fergo had the better of it that time The combatants rose up and shook themselves, and once more circled about, watching each other closely

Fergo was getting hot and flushed, for he had not expected such a severe contest His breath was going and his legs trembled a little He was, besides, exceedingly angry and ashamed at having been once thrown, and he knew that his victory in the last round had been indecisive

Bran, on the other hand, had taken his enemy's measure and felt that he knew what to expect He was as fresh as ever, breathing easily, and quite cool and good-humoured

The crowd was watching tensely, and breathing deeply with excitement Vardia had gone quite pale, and his eyes met Bran's questioningly Bran gave him a confident smile, eyed Fergo with amusement, and proceeded to play with him He began by making for him as if to clinch at once, but dodged away the moment he was within grasping distance Then he pretended to clutch at Fergo's legs, but straightened suddenly, darted to one side, and reached out for his throat In and out he danced, until Fergo, always on the point of gripping him and always just foiled, was quite breathless and mad with humiliation He began to clutch and grope wildly, like a man fighting a ghost, and the warriors broke into roars of laughter, stamping and slapping their thighs, at his vain efforts Then Bran decided to finish it.

He ran in at Fergo's side, stooped under the

battling arms, and cast his right arm close about Fergo's right hip, his left about his left The tall man swayed and reeled backwards, but Bran was not done with him yet He put forth all the power of his back and arms, and heaved

The warriors, fallen silent again with eagerness, saw Fergo's feet fly up and his head go down as Bran held him for a moment upside down, then swung him feet foremost over his shoulder to turn a complete somersault and land in an undignified heap

'If any would wrestle with me,' Bran remarked, shaking his shoulders and tossing his curls, 'he must not eat so much'

The warriors roared with glee, for they all knew Fergo's appetite Bran was embraced, and hand-shaken, and thumped on the back, and made much of, until he declared that it was more exhausting to be a hero than to undertake a wrestling match! And then, looking up, he saw Vingi standing in the doorway of a hut and watching him with wicked eyes

Bran went to his workshop with a feeling that Vingi meant certainly to pay him out in some way Æma, who had contrived to slip in for a moment after dark, thought so too

'Thou wert a fool to fight with Fergo,' she said 'Now Vingi is angry with thee, and——'

'I know,' said Bran

'Why didst thou do it?' demanded Æma. 'I thought thou hadst a wise head, but it seems thou art as foolish as the others, and must needs show thy might though it cost thee thy life'

Bran looked at her steadily 'Maybe I thought that it was worth while to hinder a plan of Vingi's at any cost,' he said

Æma stared without speaking Presently she said. 'I do not know if thou art very wise or very foolish But—I saw the match, Bran, and—it was splendid ' She ran away without more words

Next day came Vingi to the smithy, and Bran braced himself for the worst But Vingi only greeted him smilingly

'Smith,' he said, 'show me that chain of bronze which thou hast made.'

Bran produced it Vingi pulled it this way and that

'Thou knowest Dunhide, my bull?' he said

'Surely,' Bran answered

'He broke loose yesterday and gored Whitehorn, Garoch's bull I cannot get a rope strong enough to hold him. Now, couldst thou make one of these things strong enough to bind him, thinkest thou?'

'It would take much bronze,' said Bran thoughtfully, 'but it could be done '

'The bronze does not matter. Use all thou needest I will have a chain to hobble his forefeet when he goeth to grass, and one to tether him by,' said Vingi

'I will do my best,' Bran answered, and waited for what would come next

It seemed, however, that Vingi had nothing more to say, for with a 'See thou to it, then,' he went out of the smithy.

Bran was surprised, but he guessed that Vingi wanted the chain, and had put off the punishment until it was done That was like Vingi—never in a hurry, never forgetting

During the next few days Bran worked hard on the chain that was to hold Dunhide the bull He

had no idea of putting off the evil day by taking a long time over it, but preferred to know the worst as soon as possible He made the chain strong, moreover, testing its links carefully one by one, for even though he worked for his enemy he preferred that the work should be sound At length it was finished and he took it to Vingi's hut.

Vingi took the heavy links in his thin hands and smiled.

'Is it strong?' he asked

'Let three or four warriors pull upon it to test it,' suggested Bran

Vingi called up a man and bade him fetch three hefty men to try the chain. All together they tugged, but the chain held.

'Very good work,' said Vingi approvingly 'Thou art a right good craftsman, Bran the Bronze-smith But I think we will have one more test Call some more men, Rauni.'

Several more warriors came at the summons, and stood nervously silent, eyeing one another and Bran

'Take him and hold him fast!' suddenly barked Vingi, pointing a gnarled finger at Bran

Two of the men seized him by the arm

'Bring him to the smithy,' Vingi commanded, and led the way there, carrying the chain

The warriors led Bran, unresisting, since nothing could be gained by a struggle, to the smithy and stood awaiting further orders.

'We will try the chain on its maker,' croaked Vingi. 'If it can hold the mighty Bran, the Wrestler, it can surely hold Dunhide the bull Fasten the short chain to his ankles, men'

Now Bran understood The cunning of Vingi had

made him forge a chain to bind himself—and well Bran knew how strong a chain it was!

Reluctantly, for they liked him, but not daring to disobey the terrible little man, the warriors fastened bands of bronze to Bran's ankles and riveted the chain to them

'And now,' said Vingi with satisfaction, 'fasten the long one from his neck to the chain at his feet.'

So they chained Bran, so that he could just stand upright and walk fairly easily, but could not run, nor jump, nor climb, nor wrestle. Vingi laughed

'Now for the test!' he cried. 'See if thou canst break thy chain, thy strong chain that thou hast forged Try! Strain at the links, thou strong one!'

Bran would not give him the pleasure of watching his vain efforts Too well he knew the soundness of the chain that he had made He stood with his hands at his side and his head up, and Vingi, seeing that he was not going to get any more fun, laughed again and went out.

When he was alone, Bran sat down and thought, his chin in his hands Certainly this was a beautiful revenge of Vingi's, and would effectively hinder him from any more wrestling, or anything save his bronze working and his fetching and carrying of burdens

But there was something that he ought to remember—something that had to do with a chain—Bran's mind went back over the years, and the black figure of the priest came up before his memory, while those strange words seemed to ring in his ears again

'Thou shalt forge a chain for thy neck and thine ankles, and out of that chain thou shalt make a sword that shall conquer a city'

Well, though he had not then even known what a chain was (they were not in the habit of making them in the Age of Bronze), he had certainly forged it now But how was he going to make it into a sword that should conquer a city?

There was more that the priest had said, though. Wait.

'Hands that shall bring thee over the sea again'—why, so they had!—'hands that shall cheat the dead of the living'—that would be when he stole Arril away—'and serve the gods by breaking their laws'—would that mean when he, an Outlander, had learned the secrets of bronze-making?

Since so much of the prophecy had come true without his thinking about it, Bran felt that it would not be unreasonable to expect the rest to come about also He would not disturb himself, then, but wait and see how things turned out Nothing, thought Bran, was ever gained by worrying

It did occur to him to wonder whether he should file the chain off during the night and cast it into a sword before morning, but a little thought showed him that someone would certainly come to see why the furnace was burning so late. Vardia's plans were not ready yet, and if Bran were forced to flee from the Crannog, he would not be able to give the help he had promised No, any attempt to force the fulfilment of the prophecy would only result in disaster For the present he must wear the chain and submit to Vingi.

CHAPTER XXIV

ÆMA'S WARNING

LATE that evening Vardia, who had been away hunting when Bran was chained, strode into the workshop and took the young smith's hands in his

'Oh, Bran!' he exclaimed, 'I am sorry that this thing hath been done! But I think,' he went on, his eyes kindling, 'that Vingi hath gone too far this time Oh, but the warriors are angry! It was a fair fight, for a fair wager, and there should have been no ill-will after it Fergo hath fallen still lower in their hearts'

'Then now is thy time,' said Bran 'Speak to them to-night, make them swear fellowship with thee'

'I will,' declared Vardia. 'Listen—here they come even now, to tell thee of their grief and anger'

A crowd of the young men surged into the smithy and surrounded Bran, their eyes gleaming, their faces hot with rage

'Oh, curses on Vingi the black-hearted!' they cried 'To do this to thee, our kindly Bran, thou who hast ever shown thyself douce and quiet! It is an ill thing, a wicked sin, and may the witch-eagle tear out Vingi's liver!'

Bran said nothing, but smiled and shook their hands, glancing at Vardia The young chieftain sprang upon the platform of stones that was Bran's work-table and shouted:

'Men of the Crannog! Hearken to me!'

They all stopped talking and turned towards him Vardia dropped his voice, in case any one should be listening outside, and went on.

'Do ye indeed desire the death of Vingi?'

There was a murmur from the group like distant thunder

'Then follow me, and we will slay him this very night'

The flushed faces paled, and the warriors looked at one another fearfully.

'But indeed, Vardia, he is too well guarded!' protested someone.

'Are there not enough of us to overcome Vingi's guards?' demanded Vardia 'Shall we not free ourselves of this Earth-Child's tyranny, and then march forth and take Liwr's Dun?'

There was some excitement at this bold suggestion, and as the whispering and muttering broke out again, Vardia hushed it and went on to lay before the young men the scheme he and Bran had outlined. That it pleased them was evident, but the fear of Vingi lay heavy on them, and at last an older man spoke up

'This comes too suddenly, Vardia We do not doubt thy courage, but thou art full young for a chieftain, and the slaying of Vingi needs careful planning If we should fail, we were lost indeed Moreover, even if all the warriors of the Crannog followed thee, there would not be enough of us to capture Liwr's Dun Thou sayest rightly, we must have more Let us make certain that more will come before we strike at Vingi'

If ye will not, ye will not,' said Vardia rather sullenly. 'Though I say, strike now and have done

with it Nevertheless, thou, Arkunna, art older than I, and I yield me to thy rede Now concerning the winning of others to our side There is none of the villages round about but hates my father for the raiding and enslavement and heavy burdens he hath laid on them I think, therefore, that they will listen to me when I plan to set myself in his place Therefore I and one or two more will go forth from here, and passing from place to place sound them to see if they will follow me And when we have gathered enough, we will slay Vingi, and put down my father from being chief, and march forth together to conquer Liwr's Dun!'

'And how if thy father will not take his putting down quietly?' Arkunna looked sideways at Vardia

The young man's face grew stern

'I would not wish to do my father any harm,' he said, 'but he hath ruled the Crannog ill of late I shall not stick at what may be needful'

'That is well,' said Arkunna grimly 'And now, how if Vingi and Garoch question where thou art, Vardia?'

'I will be lost in the bog,' said Vardia, his grave face breaking into a grin of boyish mischief 'And I 'll wager neither Vingi nor my father will mourn me long! We will go hunting again, and ye will bring back word that I was caught in the marsh, and that Arkunna, trying to save me, was drowned too Is it good?'

'It is good,' Arkunna agreed 'But we shall need a third—and three is over-many to be drowned at once!'

'Caradin must get lost two days later,' said Vardia, 'and join us in Dyra Vale by the Long Stone'

'I will do that,' cried Caradin, glowing with delight.

'And then do ye go about your business as before,' Vardia continued 'I may be long gone, many moons, so lose not your heart if ye hear not from me. The work must be thoroughly done, or it were better not done at all But when ye see a beacon on the hill-top hidden five times, send me out a messenger that I may know how things go here, and I will send word what to do Is it good rede?'

'It is good rede,' the men nodded approvingly 'But be not over-long, Vardia, for our souls hate Vingi.'

At this moment the skin across the door was swept aside, and the girl Æma slipped into the smithy and stood with her back against the door-post She was rather white, and her eyes looked dark and frightened

'Vardia!' she said in a low voice, 'Vardia son o' Garoch!'

'What is it?' demanded Vardia from his platform

'Vingi seeks thy life this night!' the girl whispered. 'He will send one to stab thee while thou art asleep, and after throw thy body into the water I think—he suspects something I heard him give his order, when he did not know that I was there!'

Vardia laughed.

'Then I must set out a little earlier, it seems,' he said 'I will go now, in the dark, and let Vingi's men find the trap empty when they come'

'Rather,' suggested Bran, breaking silence for the first time since the men had entered, 'go all of ye to Arkunna's hut and feign to hold a revel Let Vingi think ye have all drunk deeply Then shall ye all sleep together, as it were each one where he fell, and

in the morning ye can all go forth as planned But Vardia and Arkunna will not return'

'Very wisely spoken, Bran!' cried Arkunna 'Come then, all of ye, and we will at least keep Vingi sleepless with our singing'

They all surged out of the smithy, shouting and laughing, leaving Æma and Bran facing one another alone

'That was bravely done of thee,' Bran said. 'Go, now, quickly, lest Vingi should find thee out'

'I did it because Vardia is thy friend,' replied Æma

'And I,' said Bran, 'suggested that they go to Arkunna's house, that Vingi should have no cause to think that any had warned Vardia'

'Thou art as wise as thou art strong,' said Æma, and slipped through the doorway into the darkness

CHAPTER XXV

THE FLOGGING OF ÆMA

VARDIA'S scheme of escape was carried out perfectly The young warriors came back sadly from their hunting, and announced that the son of their chief had made a mistake in crossing a bog, and been sucked in and smothered; also that Arkunna, in trying to pull him out, had lost his life too.

Garoch, who had been fond of his son, although he never troubled to show it, broke into a storm of curses which ended in sobs But Vingi said, with his thin smile.

'Boys who drink late at night oft have unsteady feet in the morning'

Garoch, who, though he usually did as Vingi told him, sometimes lost his temper with him, hereupon dealt him a blow which stretched the little man on the ground Vingi was still smiling when he got up, but it looked very like the snarl of a beaten dog

After that Garoch went to pieces rapidly, and Vingi encouraged him The chief had always been accustomed to drink more than was good for him, but now he drank most of the time More and more power fell into Vingi's hands, and you may be sure he did not use it mercifully

The weeks went on, and became months, and Bran and the young warriors began to watch the hills for Vardia's signal fire But it did not come, and, naturally enough, they got no news of him In those days, when there was no writing, but a few signs, half symbol, half picture, messages had mostly to

be sent by word of mouth. And Vardia would find it hard to contrive to send any one Folk were more patient then than now, and were not surprised if their friends turned up after an absence of a year or two

But as the months passed, winter came, the days shortened, the turn of the year passed, and the Sun's Returning Festival was held, and still nothing was heard of the young chief; hearts grew heavy, and men spoke together of the evil chances that might happen on so dangerous a mission

They came often to the smithy of an evening, to talk things over with the young bronze-smith Should they give up waiting for Vardia, and strike at once? For the tyranny of Vingi was becoming unbearable

But Bran, sitting with his head stooped forward in the attitude that had become his custom, because of the chain that pulled at his neck, said always:

'Wait a little Vardia may come yet'

Once he added 'Ye should have struck at Vingi on that first night, when he was unprepared Ye would not, and now his yoke is on all your necks But the time will come at last'

It was a curious thing how these fierce robber warriors came to depend upon the counsel of a slave, a boy, and one who, moreover, was self-confessed no fighter But Bran's rather lonely, rough life had made him older than his years He had always been steady, patient, and far-sighted, and now he was quite sure that the prophecy of the priest would somehow be fulfilled through Vardia

Be sure that Vingi made life as hard as possible for him When there was not work to be done in the smithy, Bran would be set, all hampered as he was, to carrying heavy burdens, hauling logs, or ploughing

with the rude, ox-drawn plough in the stiff-soiled fields, or even to grinding corn like a woman, or fetching and carrying for the little tyrant himself. And Vingi would laugh at the boy's awkward movements, and his followers, who served him through fear or because through him they had some power, laughed also. For Bran had grown, and now, if he stood upright, the chain from his neck, pulling up the chain that held his ankles, shortened his stride and made him stumble

Bran never seemed vexed Often he would laugh as if he found his difficulties amusing, and then Vingi would frown Whether he laughed or was silent, Bran knew he would be beaten, either for insolence or sullenness Finding that Vingi disliked his laughing most, he laughed

'How canst thou?' Æma demanded one day, when, Vingi being abroad on a raid, they had a few minutes for talk 'Dost thou not feel any shame, Bran, that thou shouldst play the fool for Vingi and his lick-spittle followers? And oh, Bran! thy shoulders are bowed like those of an old man! Why dost thou not cut thy chain and flee away?'

'Because I have sworn to wait for Vardia—and for another reason,' said Bran

'Vardia is dead! The summer is almost here, and still he comes not!'

'Then,' said Bran, 'I must help my friends here to rid themselves of Vingi.'

'How canst thou, chained as thou art? Does not that chain gall thee, Bran?'

'It did,' Bran answered, 'but I have stuffed rags at the back of it, so that it does not rub my skin Also I have learned to manage it.'

The girl burst into not very happy laughter. ‘Oh, Bran,’ she said, ‘there never was any one like thee! And was the helping of thy friends the other reason thou wouldst not escape?’

‘Nay,’ said Bran. ‘It is that I would not escape without thee—and as yet I know not where I should take thee. If I were free,’ he went on, and then changed it: ‘*When* I am free, I would have thee, Æma, for my wife.’ And he put his mighty arms about her and kissed her soundly.

It was unlucky for them that, although Vingi was away, he had left a spy behind him. This was a man, grown too fat and lazy to take part in raids and hunting, who curried favour with Garoch and Vingi by tale-bearing. He had seen the two embrace, and chuckled wheezily to himself. Two slaves making love! Here was a juicy bit of news for his master, a chance to hurt both of them. Excellent! And Bran and Æma, who had not noticed fat Oro, went about their work with an unusually happy feeling.

‘So she is in love with the chained smith!’ remarked Vingi when Oro told him. ‘Ah! Send the girl to me.’

Æma, very much frightened, but holding her head high, came as she was bid, and stood before the little dark man with her hands clasped to keep them from trembling.

‘Thou art grown a very pretty girl,’ said Vingi in his high harsh voice. ‘I think I will have thee into my hut.’

‘Thou hast a wife already, Lord Vingi,’ cried Æma, her heart beginning to thump.

‘She is growing old and ugly. I am tired of her,’ smiled Vingi. ‘I will have a maid who is fresh and young.’

'I am the slave of Ethna, Lord Fergo's wife,' Æma protested desperately

'Oh, I can buy thee' Vingi waved his hand carelessly. 'Come, child, art thou not honoured? Give me a kiss'

Æma was tall and strong, while Vingi was little and thin. As he put his lean arms about her, and pressed his leering face to hers, she struggled so violently that he was flung off and fell to the ground. When he rose his eyes were very wicked, for one or two of his men had seen his fall, and Garoch, who was lounging at the door of his house, burst into a bull-roar of laughter at his counsellor's defeat

'Ah,' said Vingi, smiling of course, 'she must be taught, must she? We will show the Crannog that slaves must keep their place Take her and tie her up to the whipping-post, and bring all the slaves to see'

'And Bran the Bronze-smith also?' asked Oro the Fat One, filled with delight at the idea

'I said *all* the slaves,' retorted Vingi, and Oro shuffled away, to take, as his especial part of the treat, the business of bringing Bran to look at Æma's punishment

Bran felt sure that some mischief was afoot when Oro came, beaming and sniggering, and bade him come straightway to the meeting-place He would very much have liked to grip his hard fingers into that flabby neck and choke the sniggering dumb, but he knew better than to make unnecessary trouble So he came, walking awkwardly because of the chain, with his shoulders stooped. The muscles of those shoulders rolled in great waves, for he had grown very much during the past months, perhaps owing to the heavy labour Vingi piled upon

him; and there were those who whispered, looking at him uneasily, that Vingi had indeed got a chained bull there!

When he saw Æma bound to the post, her shoulders bared ready for the lash, he clenched his hands together, the veins stood out on his forehead, and his chest swelled   Vingi was watching him maliciously, the mocking lines deepened in his dark face   Then he lifted up his voice and cried

'Ye men of the Crannog, and ye slaves, I have brought ye all here to see disobedience and ingratitude punished   Know that I have greatly honoured this maid by purposing to take her into my house   But she is sullen and unmindful of the honour   Therefore she shall have fifty strokes of the lash to teach her manners   And after—I will take her   Lay on, Hulum '

But at the sight of the whip falling on Æma's shoulders, and the red streak that followed on her brown skin, Bran's great patience, that had been the wonder of all who knew him, broke suddenly, and his greater anger burst out in a torrent

He gave one shout, like a lion's roar, he planted his feet firmly, threw out his chest, grasped the chain, and strained at it with all the power of his thick neck, big arms and mighty back   And those that, startled by his cry, had turned to look at him, beheld a wonder   For those strong links that he had forged himself were rent asunder, breaking in two the chain that held his ankles, and, with the loose end swinging free, Bran hurled himself upon the scourger and knocked him senseless   Then before any one could collect their wits enough to act he turned upon Vingi, caught up the little man and, with one hand on his

neck and the other arm across his thigh, bent him backwards over his knee.

In vain Vingi clawed with skinny fingers at the hand at his throat, hard and immovable as the bronze it was used to work with In vain he tried to kick against the remorseless arm that pinned his legs Back and back he went, shrieking in agony, until those standing near heard a dull snap, and the tyrant hung limp across Bran's knee, his back broken.

'Seize him! Slay him!' roared Garoch, coming to his senses at last. But his men had left their bows in their huts, and, armed though they were, they hesitated to tackle this new and terrible Bran who faced them, with blood trickling over his shoulders where the chain had cut into his neck in that terrific effort, the body of Vingi dangling loosely in his hands Only Garoch, brave at least, advanced with drawn sword.

Bran shouted again, a shout of laughter this time, and hurled the dead Vingi at the chief, almost knocking him over. Then he snatched up the whip from the hand of the still senseless Hulum, and laid about him with such effect that he kept his foes at bay for several moments By this time the slaves had recovered their wits, and gathered about their champion. They had no weapons, but they dealt shrewd blows with fist and foot, and standing back to back fought nobly, heedless of cuts, snatching where-ever they could at their enemies' swords.

Now, roused by the uproar, the warriors came running from their huts More than half of them were friends of Bran and supporters of Vaidia, and, taking in the meaning of the scene, or at any rate part of it, they gave an exultant yell and, with drawn swords, rushed to the help of the smith After that

there was fierce fighting, up and down, in between the huts and in and out of the doors, until of the followers of Garoch and Vingi some were dead, some badly wounded, and the rest had flung down their weapons and surrendered to the rebels Garoch was dead and Fergo was dead, and Oro had run away so fast that he had a fit, and was found dead between the huts without a mark on him!

Dusk was falling as Bran, the scourge still in his hand, its thongs dyed red with blood, the broken chain dangling from his neck, strode back to the whipping-post Æma still stood there, upright and with a proud light in her eyes Still in his mad triumphant mood, Bran stayed not for a knife, nor to untie the knots, but snapped the cords and lifted her and set her on his shoulder The victorious rebels gathered round them, wiping their blades and binding up their wounds They were amazed and awed by what they had so unexpectedly achieved, and instinctively they turned to Bran to tell them what to do next

Suddenly Æma, high on Bran's shoulder, raised her hand and pointed with a cry across the water to where the low hills showed black

'A fire!' she cried 'Look—look! A beacon fire!'

Every one turned their heads and stared at the red glow that flared out of the dark It disappeared, shone out again, once—twice—five times Vardia's signal!

'At last!' said someone 'Well, he comes too late We 've done the work without him'

'And what of Liwr's Dun?' Bran thundered. 'We have not finished the work! Go, go, Viona Lightfoot, run speedily and bid the chieftain Vardia come and enter into his own!'

CHAPTER XXVI

VARDIA'S RETURN

So Vardia came home in triumph, and with him came, not two, but twenty men. And these, he told the astonished Crannog Folk, were but the advance guard of the army that was gathering from far and near into the hills, to march with him on Liwr's Dun

There was high revel that night in the Crannog, when the dead had been cleared away into Vingi's hut to await their burning on the morrow But Bran, although he was the hero of the hour, refused to join it He had other work to do, he said. They would have forced him in, but he only looked at them steadily, and as their eyes fell on the piece of broken chain they shrugged their shoulders, smiled, and forbore to press him further They had no wish to be broken like Vingi

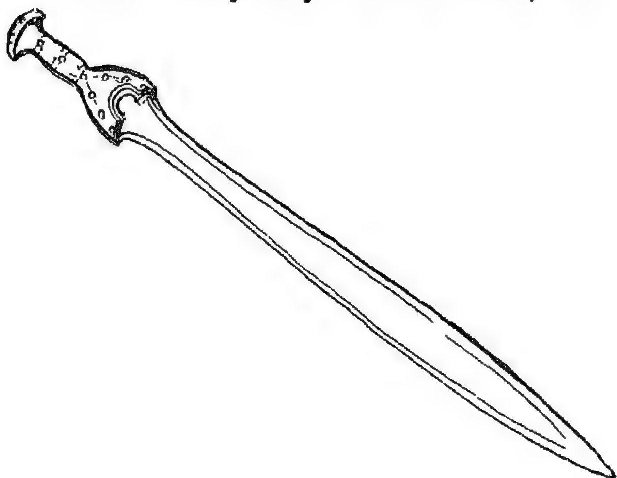
So Bran went to his smithy, and worked there all the night. He filed the chain from his neck and the bands from his ankles, and he cast the links of the broken chain into the melting-pot, and then, taking a large mould, that he had prepared against this very time, he cast a sword It was the longest that he had ever made, full thirty inches in the blade, a goodly length for a sword of bronze

Æma had followed him into the smithy, and worked with him at the bellows, her face flushed and eager in the light of the fire When the sword was cooling in the mould they sat down and talked, for the first time without fear of interruption.

'Why,' said Æma, her head very comfortably against Bran's shoulder, 'art thou so determined on the making of this sword? Wilt thou go with Vardia against Liwr's Dun?'

'I do not think so,' Bran answered. 'He will not need me. But the sword I have made for him.'

'I think it is very likely he will need thee,' Æma



sighed. 'All the strong arms he can muster he will need, and whose is stronger than thine?'

'But I am no warrior,' Bran repeated, and Æma laughed.

'One who saw thee yesterday fling Vingi in the face of Garoch, and sweep through the Crannog with thy bloodstained scourge, would not have thought so,' she remarked.

'Then? Ah, but I was angry then,' Bran explained, and Æma laughed again.

'Well, why wilt thou give the sword to Vardia

instead of keeping it for thyself?' she asked, changing the subject.

'That the word of the priest might be fulfilled,' Bran answered. 'Listen' And he told her of the prophecy

When he had finished she clapped her hands, and took his great hard fingers and kissed them; and there was a great deal of foolishness talked for some time

'Now,' said Bran at last, 'I would be perfectly happy were it not for one thing.'

'I know,' said Æma understandingly 'Thou wouldest find again Arril thy friend. Well, when Liwr's Dun is taken thou canst send messengers through all the land seeking for him'

'Thou speakest as though I were a great chief, to say "Go" and "Come" to this man and that,' objected Bran

'Thou hast said "Go" and "Come" to many, and they did so But no matter now, we shall see what we shall see And now let me bind up that wound in thy neck, for it is caked with blood and thy hair hath stuck to it, and it will give thee a fever if it is not looked to.'

Bran finished the sword next day He hammered the blade to a beautiful keenness, riveted plates of horn to the handgrip, and weighted the pommel with lead to make it balance It was a lovely thing, curved like a long delicate leaf, and burnished like gold

Vardia was delighted when he saw it, and when Bran told him of the prophecy, his joy knew no bounds

'The sword that shall conquer a city!' he exclaimed, swinging it. 'Never have I seen one so

fairly wrought. But, Bran, it is somewhat heavier than the one I am used to.'

'Thou wilt get the feel of it in time,' Bran replied. 'I shall think of thee with joy, wielding it as thou cleavest thy way into Liwr's Dun.'

'Think of me? What is this?' exclaimed Vardia. 'Thou shalt see me wield the sword indeed, for wilt thou not be by my side?'

'How many times,' said Bran, 'shall I tell thee that I am no warrior?'

Vardia, as Æma had done, laughed heartily. 'They told me a different tale who yesterday brought tidings to me,' he said. 'Bran, I would that I could have seen the breaking of that chain!'

'I do not know how I did it,' replied Bran. 'It must have been the power of Diwa the Smith-god that fell upon me.'

'And therefore,' Vardia hastened to add, 'thou art needed by the warriors and by me. The men will lose heart if they march without thee, for they trust greatly in the strength of thy god, my Bran. Nay, never set thy jaw and pull thy brows down. I will not threaten thee with punishment for disobedience.'

'And that is well,' put in Bran, 'for I am not minded to be beaten any more.'

'Why, here's a new man from the patient slave who bore all things meekly!' Vardia teased him. 'Is it that thou hast tasted victory and power, or is it that the eyes of Æma have rested on thee and made thee proud?'

Bran's face grew rather red. 'I do not see the usefulness of being beaten,' he began to explain, but Vardia cut him short with a shout of laughter, and thrust his hand through his arm.

'As I was saying,' he went on, 'I will not try to punish thee lest thou break my back also Neither will I hold out promises of wealth and glory, for I do not think that thou canst be bought But I will say that we all need thee, for thou bringest the favour of thy god in thy mighty strength and thy great wisdom. It was thou who first set me on this adventure Leave me not now!'

'Well,' said Bran reluctantly, 'I suppose I must come But indeed I am so poor a fighter that I do not see what use I shall be'

Vardia laughed again, slapped Bran on his broad back, that was still bowed from the effects of the chain, and went about his business

The days that followed were full of plans and hard work Vardia's mixed army, consisting of little groups of five, ten, anything up to thirty, from the villages he had visited, had to be armed and drilled into some order Altogether, he had about three hundred men, and only ten chariots in all. But Bran devised a means of making these last very deadly, by fixing great blades to their hubs These revolved as the chariot rumbled forward, and any one coming near was liable to get his leg severed Highly unpleasant instruments, but ones which remained in use for many hundreds of years

Bran also advised the young chief to make the most of his archery 'Liwr will have many chariots,' he said, 'and it is hard for men on foot to stand against such But if thou sendest thine arrows before thee, to slay their horses or put panic in them, then will their chariots be turned to their own destruction'

Bran was kept very busy over armaments. He

hammered out many round targes of bronze, set with bosses from which arrows would glance, and reinforced with linings of hide. He made and mended swords, daggers, spearheads, and palstaves He put new rims on their chariot sides, and on their hubs, and furnished the horses with bits and cheek-pieces

All these preparations took some time, and Midsummer was now approaching Vardia decreed that the Feast of the Sun should be made especially splendid, and that great sacrifices should be offered to Lo that his favour might be with them

'I have heard it said that once, when there was a great famine in the land because of excessive rain, a king gave unto Lo a golden chariot, like unto that which Lo drives across the sky by day, and with Lo's golden disk fixed to its side,' Æma said to Bran one day 'Bran, thou art skilful with thy fingers Strange it is to me that hands so great and strong as thine should be so cunning! Couldst thou make for Lo a golden chariot, thinkest thou?'

'How large a one?' asked Bran

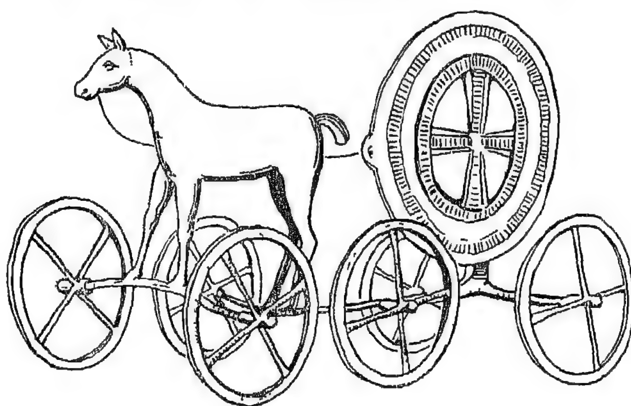
'Nay, only a span in length. Then shall the priest kill it and lay it upon the Sacred Place on the bog, and Lo will take it to himself, and by his power make it grow to any size Then, if he favours us, he will come amongst us in the golden chariot and give us victory'

'I see,' said Bran 'Well, if Vardia will get me the gold I will see what I can do'

Vardia was delighted with the idea He promptly asked the Folk of the Crannog for offerings, beginning by himself casting the golden bracelet which had belonged to his father upon the floor of the smithy Soon Bran had so many gifts of gold that

he laughingly said that he would be able, at this rate, to make a full-sized chariot for Lo!

When the work was finished it was a beautiful thing A little six-wheeled carriage, with at one side of it a golden disk engraved with a cross, the symbol of the sun's rays In the front of the carriage was mounted a little golden horse, his ears pricked eagerly forward, a slender bridle thread connecting him with a loop on the sun-disk's side.



'I thought Lo might be pleased to have a horse as well,' Bran explained

On Midsummer Day, with much rite and chanting, the priest broke the disk (to 'kill' the chariot and set its spirit free) and cast it into the bog in the Sacred Place for Lo to take at his pleasure. And it so chanced that the chariot and horse sank and were lost, but the broken disk was found not so many years ago, and you may see it in the British Museum But that has nothing, of course, to do with our story

Behold then Vardia's army, strong in the sense of

Lo's protection, and sure also that Bran's god Diwa was present with him, setting out on foot and in chariot for the Dun of Liwr the Great King. The army was divided into six companies, and at the head of each went a chariot armed with scythes. Behind the chariots came the bowmen, each with a well-filled quiver and a stout sword at his side After them the spearmen marched, and they also carried swords as an alternative weapon, and a buckler on the left arm They were followed by the baggage wagons drawn by oxen, and these, in order that all the fighting men might be free, were driven by women and boys. You may be sure that Æma was one of the women!

They marched rapidly, for they were well drilled and in fine condition Bran had got over the hampering of his legs by the chain, and marched with the old steady stride that could outlast the strongest, but his shoulders were still bowed, and indeed to the end of his days he was never quite cured of the habit of stooping It earned him, among other names that were from time to time fastened upon him, the title of Bran the Bull

The second night, when they were encamped under the shelter of a wood, and the camp-fires were blazing high, a man in a long cloak, with a hood thrown over his head, came up boldly to the sentries, who challenged him

'A word for Vardia son o' Garoch, the Chief,' was the answer, 'concerning the men of Loga, who would have his help'

'Bring him along,' called Vardia, who had overheard.

The stranger came forward into the light of the fire

'Now what is this,' questioned Vardia, 'about the men of Loga, who are Liwr's folk? And who art thou?'

'I am Eidia, servant of Amrach, Headman of

Loga,' was the answer 'The men of Loga say Liwr is old and foolish, and he hath no sons Moreover, his hand is very heavy on the people, and we must pay him yearly much gold and many cattle Also, his captains are tyrants over us, so that we have many masters We ask, therefore, that thou, Vardia, shouldst let us join thee in this war, and thereafter we will be thy people and serve thee '

'That is well-sounding indeed,' commented Vardia 'But how know we that thou comest from Amrach indeed?'

'Question me,' replied the messenger coolly, 'and if I trip or fail in aught, thou mayest say I lie '

Vardia put one or two searching questions which the young man answered confidently Then the chief lifted up his voice and shouted for Bran, who was talking to Æma in the shadow and had not noticed what was happening

'Here, Bran! Bran the Bronze-smith! Where art thou? Come and tell me what thou thinkest of this fellow.'

The stranger started, and pulled his hood a little more forward, as if to shield his eyes from the brightness of the fire Bran came up, bareheaded and bare-shouldered, for the night was warm, and his grey eyes met the stranger's dark ones and grew wide He controlled himself, however, and was silent for a moment

'What is the tale?' Bran demanded after a pause Vardia told him

'It sounds well,' he finished 'Say, shall we march by Amrach's village and gather up his men? Or shall we go on our road without turning aside, and bid Amrach send his men to us at Liwi's Dun?'

'I think we will give the messenger a night's rest

first,' advised Bran. 'And in the morning we will talk. All we are weary now, and weary heads make ill plans.'

'I would return with my message to-night,' said the stranger, and his voice sounded uneasy.

'Nay,' said Vardia suspiciously, 'there is no such need of haste. Sit thee down, if thou be an honest man, and break bread with us.'

Unwillingly the stranger sat, and though it was June, and moreover the fire was hot, he always kept his hood about his head and his face in shadow.

'I do not like the look of this,' said Vardia in a low tone to Bran. 'At first I thought all was well, for he answered fairly, but now I am not sure.'

'Let me have the care of him to-night,' suggested Bran. 'I 'll guard him well, and to-morrow we shall see.'

'Hast thou something in thy wise head? Well, then, take him in thy charge. He is not likely to break from thy grasp,' said Vardia.

Bran went up to the messenger and laid a hand on his arm.

'Come with me,' he said, 'and I will show thee a sleeping-place.'

He led him out of the firelight, and when they were out of sight and earshot of the rest, suddenly plucked the hood away. A mass of long black hair fell over the shoulders.

'And what doest thou here, *Arril?*' said Bran.

'What doest *thou*, Bran?' retorted Arril sullenly.

'I fight for Vardia son o' Garoch, Chief of the Crannog Folk,' Bran answered. 'He is my friend. And thou—thou art spying for Liwr, my friend's enemy!'

'Thou hast me in thy power,' said Arril. 'Thou canst have me slain.'

'Oh, Arril, Arril, what a meeting is this!' groaned Bran 'All these many moons have I longed for thee—and now I have sworn fellowship with Vardia And even if I could, I would not break that vow, for I have grown to love him.'

'More than thou lovest me?' said Arril, with the old swift jealousy

'How could that ever be? Art thou not the friend of my boyhood?'

'Then,' urged Arril, 'let me go! There are horses tethered yonder I could leap on the back of one of them and break through the sentries before they were aware, and none could blame thee'

Bran kept his grip of Arril's arm

'That may not be,' he said gently, 'for I serve Vardia But — hast thou sworn fellowship with Liwr?'

'Nay,' answered Arril 'I am a slave—the slave of Koad, Liwr's captain of warriors.'

'Dost thou then love Liwr? Hath he been good to thee? Is he a great and honourable chief?'

'He is an old fool, lazy and weak,' said Arril, with his usual disrespect

'Is it this Koad, then, thou lovest?'

'Nay, though he is a brave man and a good captain. He hath made me his charioteer, though he likes better to fight on foot But—but——'

'What is his hold on thee?' said Bran 'Tell me quickly'

'He hath a daughter,' Arril answered 'She hath hair like threads of sunshine, and her eyes are like the blue waters of a lake And Koad hath promised that if I serve him well in this war he will set me free and give me wealth Therefore he set me to bring

Vardia into a trap! And when I am free I will ask him for his daughter.'

'Arril, what a babe art thou!' cried Bran roughly, 'to think that ever Koad would keep his word to a slave! Dost thou not see he only uses thee? He will laugh when thou returnest for thy reward.'

Arril stared at his friend. 'Surely he would not be so cruel,' he protested.

'Hast thou not yet learned how cruel men can be? But I know.' Bran's hand went to the scar on the back of his neck. 'Arril, if thou wilt serve Vardia, I will speak for thee to him that this girl be given thee when we have taken the city.'

'Taken Liwr's Dun!' scoffed Arril. 'Thou knowest not what thou sayest! Liwr hath five hundred bowmen, and they stand upon his walls with arrows at their bow-strings. And he hath thirty chariots and two hundred spearmen, and there are three walls to his Dun, and but two gates. The south one is guarded by many warriors, and the one in the north cannot be reached save across a bog, of which no stranger knows the path.'

'Dost thou know it?'

'Ay, for Koad sent me forth by it.'

'Then,' Bran exclaimed, and he gripped Arril's arm so that the boy cried out with pain, 'thou shalt show us the path to the north gate, and we will take the Dun by surprise. I begin to see the way by which we shall take the Dun by craft and boldness, if thou wilt help us. Thou shalt have thy girl—I promise thee this, for I have some power with Vardia. I will tell thee the tale to-night. Wilt thou trust me, Arril?'

Arril looked into Bran's steady eyes, and found assurance there.

CHAPTER XXVII

LIWR'S DUN

'DID I not say,' Vardia demanded when Bran came to him in the morning with the story, 'that the luck of the gods is with thee? Now if thou hadst not come with me, I should have been utterly deceived by the well-told tale of this young rascal.' He smiled good-humouredly at Arril, who smiled back, liking the young chief's looks 'Whereas,' Vardia went on, 'he shall be to us the means of victory Now, lad, if I swear to get thee thy girl when the Dun is in our hands, wilt thou serve me faithfully?'

'I 'll see that he does,' said Bran gruffly But Arril, fixing his black eyes on Vardia's blue ones, looked steadily for a long time, and then dropped on one knee.

'I swear that I will serve thee,' he said, 'and thou shalt be to me as Madoc the Prince, who is dead'

'That is an oath indeed,' said Bran 'Fear not, Vardia! He will surely be faithful'

'Later on I will hear about this Madoc, whose name makes so strong an oath,' said Vardia 'But just now we must make plans How many men, think you, are needed to cross the marsh and take the Dun by surprise?'

'Are thy horses fleet?' Arril asked

'They are good, but no wonders,' Vardia answered 'What of it?'

'Only this; that there should be a feigned attack on the south gate, to draw away the warriors and chariots. But the chariots will have to flee very

swiftly, or they will be destroyed And Liwr's chariots are the swiftest I have seen '

'I will send a company of archers to run behind the chariots,' said Vardia, frowning over the problem, 'to bring down Liwr's horses '

'That will be well,' agreed Arril 'But they are very many. And the archers of Liwr can shoot also '

'Would they follow us into the forest?' asked Bran.

'The chariots? Very likely Why?' asked Arril

Bran folded his arms, dropped his chin on his hand, and thought deeply, while the others went on discussing in low tones

'If we sent the chariots to draw away the defence at the south gate,' said Vardia, 'it would come to a fight in the end And the odds would be badly against us '

'If Liwr's men were held for a little, the rest of thy men could gain the Dun by the north gate,' said Arril 'And once within the Dun they might hold it '

'But it would mean death to all those in the feigned attack,' Vardia began, when Bran lifted up his head and spoke decisively

'In the early morning,' he said, 'when the mist is thick on the plain, the men within the city could not tell whether there came against them nine chariots or ninety They will not dream that with so small a host as ours we dare attack the Dun Therefore, when they see our chariots coming, they will think that there are many more, and will not be likely to suspect a trap Let there go no men on foot with the chariots, for they would fall behind in fleeing and be slain But let the best archers and the best drivers be chosen, and when they have done what mischief

they can with their shooting, let them turn and flee as if astonished by the number of Liwr's men.'

'Well,' agreed Vardia, nodding

Bran went on

'Now meanwhile more of our archers shall be hidden in the forest. And moreover we will cut the trunks of large trees almost through on either side the way, and shall hold them back from falling with ropes——'

'I see!' Arril's quick brain seized the idea 'So that when our chariots come fleeing, the trees shall fall between them and the foemen, and Liwr's chariots be thrown into confusion!'

'If we can, we will also drop trees behind them and so trap them,' Bran added, 'and our archers shall shoot them down'

'How if our chariots do not reach the forest?' asked Vardia

'They must!' exclaimed Arril fiercely

'The skill of the drivers must see to it,' said Bran 'But if they do not, the archers must burst forth and go to their help Liwr's men should at least be drawn beyond bowshot of the men within the Dun'

'Then those that are left must join us as soon as may be at the edge of the marsh,' Vardia said 'Our van will be by then within the Dun, and it will be good to have another band come up to our help Do thou, Arril, return to guide us over'

'Nay,' said Arril quickly, 'I can help ye more in the city' The others smiled, for they knew that he was thinking of the golden-haired girl 'There is a slave or two that can be trusted to work Liwr a bad turn if they get the chance I will send one of them'

'That we must leave in thy hands,' said Vardia

'And now we will call Arkunna, for it is he must lead the chariots in the feigned attack '

'Let Arril return to Liwr's Dun as soon as may be,' suggested Bran, 'and tell a false tale concerning us '

'Shall I say that ye have fallen into the trap, and let Koad lead out a band of men to Loga ?' Arril asked

'Nay, for we do not want to meet with Liwr's men before we are ready, as we should be likely to do if they were abroad Tell some tale of our unreadiness and lack of warriors, if thou wilt '

'Oh, I 'll find something And I 'll either meet ye myself or send one of those I spoke of Stay, we must have a token that they come from me indeed '

Bran slipped a bronze ring from his arm, and taking it in his powerful hands broke it in two 'There is thy token,' he said, holding out one half to Arril and one to Vardia 'Let thy messenger bring thy half, and we can see if the two halves fit '

While Vardia told Arkunna of their plans, Bran walked with Arril to the edge of the encampment, one arm about his friend's neck in the old way

'Of all strange meetings, this is the strangest,' Arril said 'But how is it that thou dost trust me, Bran? I might yet betray ye all '

'If I did not trust thee, I would break thy neck, though I love thee better than all men,' and Bran tightened his arm a little, till Arril cried out that he did not want his neck broken then 'But I trust thee because of the word that thou didst speak to Vardia, that he should be to thee even as Madoc the Prince '

'Bran, I am older now,' said Arril seriously, 'and I see much that I did not understand before Madoc was brave and beautiful, but he was rash and

unthinking, and he would have made but a poor chief when he became king. Why, there was no need for him to have lost his life in that battle—it was his pride and his folly that made him tackle Kaiko, who had twice his strength. But Vardia is wiser than his years, and, moreover, he can take advice.'

'Thou art indeed older,' cried Bran. 'And now farewell, my Arril. We shall meet within the Dun.'

'The gods guard thee!' Arril flung his arms about his friend and they embraced fervently, for it was a chance whether they would indeed meet again. Then Arril, a little breathless, for Bran was always apt to forget his strength, extricated himself, waved farewell, and slipped away into the wood.

The rest of the day was spent in preparations. The army moved further towards Liwr's Dun, and took up its position among the trees close to the wide track which led to the open space about the fort of the Great King. There they slept and rested until evening, for they would have to be on the march before dawn, and needed to be fresh. The baggage wagons were to remain hidden in the forest, and would make a rallying point for the army if anything went amiss.

The forces were then divided into three. Vardia was to lead part to the edge of the marsh, where they would meet Arril or his deputy, Aikunna was in charge of the chariots which were to make the attack, and Bran was to command those who waited in the forest. This was a hard task, for they would not know how things were going with their comrades, and long waiting tries the strongest nerves. But Bran was well fitted for the post. His patience was endless, and he was loved and trusted by the men

As dusk began to fall, Vardia drew off his detachment, for the crossing of the bog must be done by the first light, lest by full day they should be discovered There was much silent pressing of hands, and low-voiced farewells, and then the young chief and his followers faded into the hot, murky night

There was little sleep for the others Anxiety kept them waking, watchful for the first faint lightening of the sky that would be the sign for Arkunna to set out on his dangerous adventure Dangerous it was, indeed, and would need the most careful handling if it were not to involve the expedition in utter disaster.

The sky began to turn grey, and one could just see the outlines of trees and bushes near at hand. Mist lay heavy on the ground, and every leaf was wet with clinging drops of fog Arkunna whistled sharply, the charioteers sprang to their places, the archers leaped after them, there was a grinding of wheels and rattling of harness, and the chariots rolled away and were lost to sight in the mist

Now Bran, waving a cheerful farewell to Æma, led his own men to the place agreed on for the ambush They chose two mighty trees on either side of the track, and began with lusty strokes to sever the trunks nearly through When the forest giants swayed as though about to fall, ropes were cast about them and made fast to other trees. After this, two more trees, nearer to the edge of the wood, were cut half through in like manner, in the hopes of trapping the enemy chariots between the two falls

By this time the light was strong. Men could see each other's faces clearly, glistening with sweat, eager and anxious. Bran sent Viona Lightfoot to

perch on a tree at the forest's edge and give warning of the chariots' approach

The time wore on The sun came up and sent a golden glow through the mists, which began to thin and disperse Was Vardia in the Dun by now, fighting for his life? Was Arkunna retreating dexterously, luring on Liwr's men to destruction? Or had he been caught and overcome? What was happening?

Then Viona came speeding up the track

'They come! They come!' he gasped, as he reached Bran 'Arkunna is the last, and the foremost of Liwr's chariots is hard on his wheels!'

Bran gave a quick order, and most of his men dropped like hares among the bushes and fern On either side the track two or three, chosen for their strength, loosened the ropes which bound the tree-trunks and held them in position by main force, ready to drop them at the signal A few more cuts with the axe, and the great trees tottered, held upright only by the straining shoulders of those who gripped the ropes.

An increasing clatter sounded through the forest Bran's men tugged and swayed, their teeth set, for the pull of the trees was enormous

'Careful!' cried Bran, 'or ye will have it fall sideways!' He seized a rope and pulled just in time to right the balance

Then with a rush the foremost chariot swept by, the maddened horses tugging at the reins Another and another, foam-flecked and desperate, in one the warrior lying senseless, in another the charioteer driving with one hand, another empty but with a great splash of blood on its bottom Lastly Arkunna,

his charioteer gone, urging his horses on himself with desperate lashes, while, so close behind him that the heads of the horses were almost touching his wheels, came the foremost of the foe.

'Loose!' thundered Bran, releasing the ropes he held. And down upon the horses' backs, crushing beast and chariot and man, fell the enormous trunks. The first chariot was dashed to pieces, the second and third, unable to stop, crashed into it and mingled with the dreadful debris. Meanwhile Bran's hidden archers arose on every side, and sent their arrows flying among the confused and struggling enemy. According to Bran's orders they shot first at the rearmost chariots, so that Liwr's warriors should be caught between two piles of wreckage; and then the men who held the trees further down the track loosed them, so that they fell and cut off the retreat. One only of the pursuing chariots was able to return and take the news of the ambush to the Dun.

Arkunna and his men had pulled up their horses, and were now coming back to take their share in finishing the business. Bran himself, his great bare arms gleaming with sweat, bent and loosed his mighty bow again and again, and his arrows pierced through flesh and bone and pinned many a writhing wretch to his chariot. His men were protected by the trees, and though Liwr's men pulled themselves together and returned the shots as best they could, they could do little damage.

At last went up a howl for mercy. Bran, anxious to waste little time before going to the help of Vardia, shouted to the foe to lay down their weapons and they would be spared. His men went swiftly among them, collecting bows and quivers, swords and

daggers. They bound those who were but little wounded, and then gathered round Bran and Arkunna for further orders

'Arkunna,' said Bran quickly, 'leave me thirty of the strongest warriors, and go join Vardia as soon as may be'

'What wilt thou do?' asked Arkunna, wondering.

'Keep them busy at the south gate,' returned Bran tersely 'We shall get there quickly. By now they are all set on the chief'

'It is good,' declared Arkunna, 'though I think but few of ye will win through Who will go with Bran the Bronze-smith?'

In spite of the danger, there was a great outcry in answer. Bran picked out the biggest warriors 'For,' he remarked, 'it is weight that will count when we force a way through the gate,' and led them without delay past the dreadful pile of slain horses and warriors and crumpled chariots, down the trail that led to Liwr's Dun, while Arkunna went with his men to the north-west to bring them up to Vardia across the marsh.

The Dun of the Great King was larger even than that of Evrawc, and well defended by its threefold walls As Bran marched, he saw before him the last remnants of refugees from the fight disappearing within the Dun, and guessed that he would be expected

As they drew near, they could hear a tumult within that told them Vardia must be at work, and the men cheered and broke into a steady trot They could see that the way was barred by heavy gates swung on wooden hinges, and that behind the stockade stood archers with bows stretched

'Charge it, lads!' cried Bran 'There's nothing for it but to make all speed we may. Up targes and forward—but do not outrun me, or we perish'

In a shower of arrows the little party pressed forward Their swords were drawn, they held their round bucklers over their heads and ran, as nowadays we run from the heavy rain of a thunderstorm—but it was not to shelter that they ran. Two of them staggered, reeled and fell, with arrows sticking out of their sides, and one or two more struggled gallantly on though wounded

Then Bran, glancing up from the shelter of his shield, saw one of the archers on the wall waver and drop down within Another, and yet another fell. Evidently someone inside was doing deadly work, and Bran could guess whose bow winged those fatal shafts It could be none other than Arril, the peerless archer, who never missed a shot

The hail of arrows was slackening now Three more of Bran's men had fallen, but they were nearly at the gate

'Now,' shouted Bran, 'show your might, my lads of the Crannog! Vardia your chief is sorely pressed within, for Arkunna cannot have reached him yet Break down the gate and in with you! All together!'

A group of warriors stood in the opening of the first rampart, their spears levelled Bran's men lowered their shields and pressed forward, and for a few moments the two bands hung locked in struggle Then Bran's followers, big men and heavy all of them, overbore the guard and forced their way towards the gate—not without the loss of two or three more of their number

'Once more!' Bran thundered. 'Down with the gate, Men of the Crannog!'

All together they hurled themselves upon the heavy barrier, which creaked and shivered at the onslaught. Mighty shoulders pushed, stout legs pressed hard into the earth with the straining effort, great arms hammered upon the yielding timbers. Another enormous heave and the gate fell inward, the timbers splintering as they were dragged apart, and Bran's men leaped the pile of wreckage. Their passage was not very strongly contested now, either through fear of their prowess or that of the unseen archer by whom so many had fallen. There was a lighter, inner gate, but Bran and his men tore it away as if it had been straw and rushed into Liwr's Dun.

'Vardia! Vardia!' shouted Bran, and his men took up the yell and echoed it. 'Vardia! Vardia! Vardia!'

'Here, Bran!' a faint voice answered out of a mêlée of clashing swords and trampling feet further inwards of the Dun, and Bran clove a way towards his chief. His men were stayed by an onset from the defenders of the wall, who, realizing how few they were, determined to prevent them from getting any further.

Vardia was fighting, supported by a dwindling band, in the centre of the Dun. Blood was streaming from his shoulder and thigh, and his strokes were growing weaker. His men were bleeding freely also, many had fallen and the men of the Dun pressed on them boldly. Then Bran came at them like a thunderbolt, knocking men over with the buckler on his left arm, hewing and piercing with the sword in his right. Presently the sword met the edge of a shield and smote it almost in half, but under the

might of that blow it snapped and left Bran with the hilt and a fragment of blade in his hand

Nothing daunted, he hurled the fragment at the head of a man between him and Vardia, splitting his head open, seized another by the scruff of his neck and flung him aside, drove his shield at another, and reached his chief at last

Vardia, panting, faint and bleeding, but courageous as ever, laughed weakly and thrust the great sword, which his weary arm could scarcely lift now, into Bran's hand

'The sword that shall conquer a city!' he said 'But it must be in thy hand, Bran, not mine'

He sank to the ground, and Bran straddled across him, holding his shield over the chief's head and striking out with great sweeps of the big sword that seemed so light in his grasp He was fighting now, not madly as on that night in the Crannog, but soberly and level-headed, his grey eyes glancing here and there, calculating how far to lean and thrust, when to cover and defend The remnant of Vardia's men, back to back, guarded him behind. Further away, little groups of Crannog men struggled with the warriors of Liwr's Dun Bran wondered what had become of Arril.

Even as he wondered, a shaft pierced the throat of a man who was attacking him closely Bran looked up to know where the arrow came from, but could see no one, and had no time to stare about There came another and another arrow, always striking down some especially dangerous foe Then suddenly Bran spied Arril, lying flat upon a roof and shooting with his bow held sideways He would not even smile at him, lest he betray his

friend's hiding-place, but he fought with renewed courage. If only Arkunna would come!

A big man, dark of hair and ruddy of face, fiercely bearded, was coming at Bran now. And Bran was hotly pressed by two others, while one of his comrades had fallen at his side, leaving a gap. He wondered briefly, for he was very busy and had little time to think, whether Arril had run short of arrows, in which case things looked rather nasty.

Bran thrust one of his assailants through, and rammed his buckler in the face of another. He expected to feel the big man's sword on his head before he could wrench his blade free, but it did not fall, and when he could turn round he saw his tall foe angrily plucking at an arrow that transfixed his sword hand. How curious that Arril had, for once, missed his fatal mark! However, it would be quite easy now to finish him off.

'Slay him not!' came Arril's clear high voice. 'It is Koad the captain!' And Arril leaped from his high perch, grown too dangerous now that he had revealed himself, and ran with drawn sword towards the group.

Bran did not quite understand, but he realized that his friend might not care to have his sweetheart's father killed. So he completed Koad's disablement by hewing at his left hand, severing two of his fingers. Koad withdrew wrathfully.

'Well done!' cried Arril merrily, stepping into the breach and standing shoulder to shoulder with Bran. 'Well and gallantly done, my Bran. Ha! They have something tougher here than they thought! But Vardia—is he dead?'

'He lives, I think,' Bran answered between thrusts.

'And why cometh not Arkunna?' Arril was talking rapidly in the midst of fighting, equally ready with tongue and sword

'He hath not had so long to get here.' Bran struck a downward stroke that cleft a skull 'But he 'll be here soon Ho, who comes?'

Arril glanced sideways

'Why, 'tis old Liwr himself!' he said in surprise 'The old man hath not fought this many a day Bran! they must be desperate to have brought him forth!'

A tall old man, grey-bearded, erect in spite of his years, but very thin, came towards them with bare, unstained sword in his bony hand About him pressed a bodyguard of young men, strong and fierce, whose stained weapons showed that they had used them well that day. Plainly the old King's presence was intended only to put heart into his men, and perhaps to invoke the favour of the gods They did not mean to fight in earnest

But Bran saw a way—a desperate way, perhaps—of ending the fight which was slowly wearing down his fellows

'Guard Vardia!' he said hastily to Arril 'And if I fall, hold fast—Arkunna cannot be long now'

With that he dashed from his place in the ring, hacking right and left, breaking into the King's bodyguard like a mad bull run amok Men went down under his blows like reeds, or reeled aside from the buffet of his shoulders He reached the King He hurled his shield with crashing force at a warrior who opposed him, flung his left arm about old Liwr's hips and hoisted him over his shoulder, and turning made his way back towards his comrades with the Great

King hanging like a load of wood over his back The King's body served him as a shield on his left, his great sword kept the foes at bay on his right There was no force in the old man's frame to struggle against the mighty muscles that gripped him

A sword-point went home in Bran's back, but it glanced off the shoulder-blade, making only a flesh wound He did not heed it, but swept on until he reached his fellows Then he faced about, and sent out a shout from his deep chest

'Down blades, down blades, O warriors of Liwr! We have your King, and we will surely slay him unless ye throw your weapons down and handsel us peace!'

'Liwr is taken! The Great King is captive!' The cry went through the Dun, and on all sides weapons were lowered The men of the Dun stood looking at one another in consternation, while the Crannog warriors wiped the blood out of their eyes and panted heavily

It was a fearful scene Within and without the ring men lay in tumbled bloody heaps, showing ghastly wounds, and the ground was churned into mud and darkly red There were horrid moans, too, from those who lived though crippled, and cries and wailing and shrieks of fear from the women who watched or crouched hiding in their huts Some of the women, be it said, had taken sword or dagger and wielded them as well as any!

Bran, looking round, felt his dislike of war increase It was quite time all this mess was tidied up.

'Bring all your weapons here,' he commanded, still holding the now passive Liwr, 'and pile them at my feet. If any refuses to yield up his weapons, your King dies.'

They had no choice Sullenly, with growls and curses, they threw down their weapons before him—swords and daggers, palstaves, spears and bows The Men of the Crannog, their swords still drawn, stood close together, the masters of the Dun

Just as the last of the weapons clanked upon the pile, there came a trampling from the north, and Arkunna with his band, flushed, hot and breathless and very much perplexed to have met with no opposition, pushed their way through the crowd They had been delayed waiting for Arul's messenger to come and lead them across the bog

At the sight of Bran standing grasping the King, the pile of yielded weapons at his feet, a great cheer broke from Arkunna's men

'Hail Bran! Bran! Bran the Bronze-smith! The mighty! The victorious! The victor! The Favoured of the gods!'

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE GIVING OF THE KINGDOM

THAT night, in the dark hall of Liwr, while Vardia lay bandaged and unconscious, and the old King sat with his head in his hands, a council of the Crannog men was held.

Arkunna, Bran, Caradin, and two or three others talked in low tones by the side of their wounded chief.

'If Vardia dies——' Caradin began nervously

'He will not die,' Bran asserted confidently 'He hath an ugly wound in his side, but his flesh is clean, and he is young and strong'

'Whether he lives or dies,' Arkunna declared downrightly, 'it is to thee, and not to him that the glory for this day is due'

'Stuff!' answered Bran almost angrily 'When Vardia entered first the Dun, in the face of such odds, not knowing if our plan had failed or not——'

'Thy wisdom planned the attack, thy courage carried it through, thy strength hath wrought such deeds that all men's mouths are full of thy praise The breaking of the gate——'

'I did that with the help of many,' Bran interrupted.

'The guarding of Vardia——'

'But for the arrows of Arril here I had surely been overborne,' Bran put in again

'The seizing of the King,' Arkunna went on unruffled,—'these won the day for us All was over by the time I came. Moreover, thou art dearly loved by the men Bran the Bronze-smith, we offer thee

the chieftainship. Liwr's Dun is ours Thou shalt be Great King '

For a moment Bran stood utterly amazed. Then he threw back his head and laughed, deep, full-chested laughter that shook the hut and made even the sad old Liwr raise his weary head and smile Then, remembering Vardia, Bran checked suddenly

'What!' he exclaimed, 'ye have here two sons of chiefs, born to command, and ye would choose me, Bran the Fatherless, a wanderer, an outcast, twice a slave, to be Great King in the Dun that was Liwr's! I think ye must be mad.'

'It is said soberly, O Bran' Arkunna was a little annoyed

'Then I say, soberly, that it may not be,' said Bran earnestly 'Just now, maybe, the folk are glamoured with my luck. But later they would grow weary of dull old Bran, heavy old Bran, who cares rather to sit and fashion the bronze than to lead warriors to war. Bran who hath no skill in anything save his forging, and perchance in wrestling also Moreover, I will have none of it I am sworn to serve Vardia '

'But——' began Arkunna But Bran's chin was thrust forward, and there was that look in his steady eyes which men had learned to know He was quite determined, and Arkunna yielded

It was only late that night that Bran realized with a start that now all the priest's words had come true. His sword had conquered a city, and he had held a kingdom in his hands and given it away!

Terms were given out next morning to the folk of Liwr's Dun, gathered outside the hall of their former King in trembling anxiety to know their fate

Vardia, firmly bandaged, pale but alert, sat on a stool at the door, with Arril and Bran on either side of him, and Arkunna and Caradin behind The trumpet sounded, and Bran cried aloud in his great voice

'Folk of the Dun that was Liwr's, hearken! Thus saith Vardia son o' Garoch, the Chief and the Conqueror· Liwr who was the Great King is old, and cannot rule ye any longer; and he hath no sons to take his place But daughters he hath, and though two be wedded, the youngest is yet a maid Vardia the Chief saith he will take Fenoa the daughter of Liwr to wife, and thus there shall be a son to Liwr And if ye will acknowledge Vardia as King, and serve him and follow him, and be faithful to him in death and in life, thus saith Vardia the great and merciful ye shall all be spared No more shall fall by the sword, but there shall be peace within the Dun.

'How say you, Men of the Dun that was Liwr's? Is it not better to follow a war-chief, a young man and a brisk, than an old greybeard whose wits are failing him? If, therefore, ye will take Vardia as your King, come forth now, all chiefs and heads of families, and swear faith to him '

There was a moment's silence, then a breath of relief They had expected death to be meted out with an unsparing hand Such were the usual ways of conquerors. Then a shout rang to the skies.

'Hail Vardia! Hail Vardia the Great King!'

And Liwr's daughter, looking at the young chief's blue eyes and yellow curls, thought she might easily go further for a husband and fare worse

And that is the end of my story, though by no means the end of Bran But he is no longer Bran the Fatherless, orphan, outcast, and slave, but Bran

the cunning Bronze-smith, Bran the Wise, Bran the Bull, and a host of other titles that men who loved and honoured him bestowed on him   And always the three, Bran, Vardia, and Arril, lived in the closest friendship, coming to one another for advice and cheer on every point   Bran's wisdom and steadfastness, Arril's quickness and fiery spirit, Vardia's courage and sense and kindliness made a good combination

Bran was very happy, for Æma, as might be expected, made the best of wives   Arril was not disappointed in Koad's pretty daughter either, while Koad himself became a most loyal follower and useful captain to King Vardia   And Vardia himself found Fenoa, Liwr's daughter, a gentle and sweet-tempered wife

Some ten years later, Vardia was slain in battle, to the great grief of all   And then, who other should be chosen to rule the kingdom, grown greater by conquest and alliance, than Bran, no less beloved and famous than the chief?   So for a space Bran sat in the seat of the Great King, but he yielded up his place to Vardia's son when the boy was full grown and a worthy successor of his father

And Arril was Bran's faithful friend until his death.

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1 From the Foreword find out (*a*) how long ago the action of this story took place, and (*b*) to what extent it is based on actual fact

2. At what age and in what land do we find Bran at the opening of the story?

3 Bran's life among the Fisher Folk was a very hard one Why? Explain how he managed to exist

4 By what name do we call the 'Sea-that-is-in-the-Middle-of-the-World'?

5 When the Fisher Folk met the Traders, what goods were exchanged in barter between them?

6. Mention some of the suggestions of Wara at the gathering in the Headman's hut

7. 'They go on for two hands' days' journey more' What do you think is meant by this statement?

8 Why did Bran leave the village of the Fisher Folk? What plan had he in mind?

9 From your reading of this work and from any descriptions or pictures you have seen, explain the construction and manipulation of a coracle

10 Tell of Bran's rescue from the sea, and of his first meeting with Arril Explain Arril's presence in the boat

11 Why did the sailors in the 'Big Coracle' think that Bran had brought them luck?

12 Where was the Isle of Mists and at what point did the 'Big Coracle' come to the shore?

13 The captain of the ship that had rescued Bran insisted on having good accommodation for his slaves What was the real reason at the back of his mind?

14 Account for Arril's horror of the flesh of a pig, and relate what happened because of it

15 What was 'the wealth of the hills' with which the people of the Isle of Mists traded? What did they receive in exchange?

16 Who bought Arril and Bran at the slave-sale, and what price did he pay?

17 How did Bran explain the rise and fall of the tide to Arril?

18. Describe the 'bread' referred to in this story

19 Where was the Land of Silver?

20. To which of the two boys did Amballo seem the more strongly attracted, and why?

21 Describe in as much detail as you can (*a*) the village of the Moor Folk, (*b*) Amballo's forge

22 What is bronze? Read up all you can find about it in books at school or in your public library

23 What is a distaff? Who carried on the tasks of spinning and weaving among the Moor Folk?

24. Of what materials did Arril make a bow, bow-case, and arrows?

25 Give a full account of the incident which won for Arril his freedom from slavery

26 What event gave Bran an opportunity to try his hand at bronze-working? Tell what you know of his experiments

27 Arril suggested a way in which Bran could avenge his flogging at the hands of Amballo What was it, and was the advice acted upon?

28 Describe how Arril tamed and rode the moorland ponies, and tell of the prank he played upon Bran

29 In what manner did Moran attempt to bribe Bran?

30 Tell in as much detail as you can the story of how Bran was assaulted by Moran, rescued by Arril, and rewarded by Amballo

31 When Bran had won his freedom he still had to work very hard What were the chief advantages of his new position?

32 Describe the dress and equipment of Bran and Arril when they set out on the journey to the Great Stone Temple.

33 Arril was very fond of practical jokes Give an account of some of them

34 Write out in full the prophecy of the priest concerning Bran As you read on through the book, notice to what extent the prophecy is fulfilled

35 Describe the Great Stone Temple Find out as much as you can about Stonehenge—from history books, encyclopaedias, or any other sources If possible draw a plan, and carefully show the points of the compass

36. Bran and Arril thought very differently from each other about the offering of sacrifices to the gods Explain the viewpoint of each of the boys

37. What were the advantages of (*a*) gold, (*b*) goats, as articles of barter in trading transactions?

38. What event resulted in the parting of Arril from

Amballo? Was Arril sorry or glad to go, and for what reasons?

39 Bran's lessons in bronze-forging were carried on in secret Say why this was so

40 From your reading of this book give a brief account of how tin and copper were mined three thousand years ago

41 'The favour of Diwa is on thee,' said Amballo to Bran What did he mean?

42 By what mischance did it become known that Bran was being taught the art of bronze-working? What made Amballo realize that the secret had become known to the Moor Folk?

43 Recount what happened at the Mote, and say how the decisions of the Moor Folk affected Bran's future

44 How did Bran provide for himself when he first found himself an outcast?

45 Tell how Bran settled accounts with Garm, and explain the ruse by which he got the better of his adversary

46 Where did Bran spend his first winter as an outcast? By what sign did he arrange a meeting with Amballo when spring came?

47 Give three reasons why Bran was a welcome guest in any village he visited

48 Why had Bran little cause to be afraid of bands of robbers?

49 Under what circumstances did Bran and Arril meet again after their first long separation?

50 Explain Bran's reasons for refusing to join Prince Madoc's Warrior Band What had he to say about the glory of war?

51. Arril called Bran 'a tame rat' because he would not fight What made him alter his opinion?

52 Describe Evrawc's Dun — its situation, defences, dwellings, and everything else of interest

53 King Evrawc professed to be a man of peace, and yet he set Bran to spy upon Karko the Black Account for this unusual state of affairs

54 Bran described Karko's Dun by comparing it with Evrawc's Dun Explain the chief differences in present-day measures

55 On more than one occasion Bran made a rough map What materials did he use, and how did he employ them?

56. Suggest what is meant by the Moon of Silence, the Moon of Winds, and the Moon of Floods.

57 By what fortunate chance did Bran discover the whereabouts of Amballo, lying injured on the moor? How had he come by his injuries?

58 From your reading about the rescue of Amballo, mention some of the simple methods of first aid and sick nursing in use long ago.

59 Who was Arandi? Show how he erred in not taking Bran's advice

60 How was it known that Moran was well in advance of his pursuers? What reasons had Bran for believing that he and Moran would meet again before long?

61 For what purposes were food and weapons placed in Amballo's grave? Say in a few words what the Headman believed would happen to him after death

62 After Amballo's death Bran was invited to stay among the Moor Folk Why did he refuse?

63 It is said of Karko that 'the ravens followed him' What does this mean?

64 In what manner did Bran return to Evrawc's Dun, and what state of affairs did he find when he arrived within the stockade?

65 Why did the King forbid Bran to kill Moran?

66 The runner brought two important items of news to King Evrawc What were they? Explain how Karko and his men were trapped by Prince Madoc

67 Linen, as we see by this story, was in use thousands of years ago Find out all you can about how it is made.

68 Why were Evrawc's warriors willing—and even anxious—to have Arril buried with Prince Madoc?

69. Putting yourself in the place of Bran, describe in detail how you rescued Arril from danger and escaped with him into the forest

70 Give a description of how Bran made soup for Arril when no cooking utensils were at hand

71. When Bran and Arril were safely away from Evrawc's Dun, how did they spend their time until they fell in with the Fisher Folk?

72 Bran and Arril behaved in very different ways when they were captured by pirates Show how this incident contrasts the characters of the two boys.

73 Where was the Golden Isle?

74 Why did the pirates wish to make Bran one of themselves? Why did he refuse, and why was he not slain for daring to defy them?

75 Explain how it came about that Bran was parted from Arril and was taken away from the pirates

76 To what extent was the Crannog like the Lake Village of Glastonbury? Describe its construction, and read up as much as you can about this type of settlement.

77. What are 'wattle' huts?

78. Describe the first smithy that Bran was able to call his own

79 Relate the incident from which sprang the friendship between Bran and Æma

80 Who was Ethna?

81 Who was Vardia? Why did he wish to learn the art of bronze-working?

82 Explain Vardia's scheme to shame Fergo Bran suggested how the plan should be followed up, what was his idea?

83 'By Lo and Miala,' swore Vardia What did he mean?

84 Imagine yourself an onlooker at the wrestling-match between Bran and Fergo Describe it to a friend who was not there

85 By whom was Bran asked to forge a strong chain, and for what purpose? Say what took place when the chain was finished

86 What was Vardia's opinion of his own father?

87 Bran felt that he had a sound reason for not cutting the chain that bound him What was it?

88 What warning did Æma give, and how was Vardia's plan changed in consequence?

89 How did the wearing of the chain affect Bran's posture?

90 Who ordered the flogging of Æma, and for what reason? Tell the story of how this event resulted in the overthrow of Garoch and Vingi

91 How did Bran make 'the sword that shall conquer a city'? Describe the sword.

92 Mention two inventions which in this story are credited to Bran

93 Enumerate the preparations for the attack upon Liwr's Dun

94 How was the chariot of Lo made, and what beliefs had Vardia's men concerning it?

95 How did the name 'Bran the Bull' originate?

96. Say what you know about the spy who visited Vardia's camp.

97 Relate as graphically as possible the account of how Liwr's Dun was taken

98 Turn back to the priest's prophecy concerning Bran, and notice to what extent it was fulfilled

99 Quote the terms offered to the 'Men of the Dun that was Liwr's'

100 Mention some of the occasions on which Bran refrained from fighting, when others would not have held back

101 Collect pictures of weapons, implements, dwellings burial-places, encampments, etc such as you have read about in this story

102 Write an essay on life in these islands three thousand years ago Among other things deal with food, clothes, homes, transport and communication, and methods of defence and attack

What incidents in the story are brought to mind by the following quotations? In each case give a brief description of what was taking place

103 'In any case some must go There will be less mouths to feed in the cold days.'

104 'Is this a time to be standing over a half-drowned brat, when we are two days off our course and the wind fit to blow her head round?'

105 'But it is unclean! It is taboo! It is a curse to touch it!'

106 'What's the use of that acorn?'

107 'Vile archers, every one of 'em *I've* shown 'em how to shoot'

108. 'Garm, my slave, hath followed him daily. He can show the place where this was done'

109 'Oh ay, if thou waitest for my leave, thou wilt wait long enough'

110 'I scared thee, did I? Thought'st I was lying dead among the heather?'

111 'I know now that thou hast been playing with me Else why didst thou change the words so many times?'

112 'The Beloved of the Gods is given to the Gods!'

113 'It seems our sons have made such friends that they will not be parted'

114 'Folk of the Moor, since when have ye taken orders from a slave?'

115. 'Moran shalt think thou *hast* died!'

116 'Well, for the honour of the Dun, I must e'en put thee down myself, lad'

117 'Steady A little more and it will be over Courage, Amballo'

118. 'Let us go down and take the killer in his smithy!'

119 'My son died bravely. He and his warriors have saved the land.'

120. 'Four men lost in the taking of two boys!'

121 'Now is the time to seize their ship! Come all of ye and help me launch her'

122 'Impossible, girl! I had it on me when the wall fell in, and it was wrenched away I believe thou hast stolen it!'

123 'Let three or four warriors pull upon it to test it'

124 'He hath ruled the Crannog ill of late I shall not stick at what may be needful'

125 'Boys who drink late at night oft have unsteady feet in the morning'

126 'I do not know how I did it It must have been the power of Diwa the Smith-god that fell upon me.'

127. 'I swear that I will serve thee, and thou shalt be to me as Madoc the Prince, who is dead'

128 'Slay him not! It is Koad the captain!'